

Monroe County Library System

Public Testimony

NYS Assembly Standing Committee on Libraries and Education Technology

The New York Public Library

Stephen A. Schwarzman Building

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New York, NY 10018

My name is Brie Harrison, and I am the Finance Director of the Monroe County Library System (MCLS) in Rochester. I am representing Patricia Uttaro, our system Director, who is out of state today. I speak for Patricia and all members of the MCLS in thanking the Assembly Committee for your time today.

The MCLS is a federation of independent public libraries serving residents of Monroe County, with a service population of 739,000. We are directed by an eleven-member board of trustees appointed by the Monroe County Legislature. Our members include chartered association, municipal and school district libraries within the County and the City of Rochester.

The Central Library for Rochester and Monroe County, located in downtown Rochester, serves as the operating hub of the MCLS. As you are aware, the majority of state library aid is directed to systems like the MCLS. Library systems maximize the ability of our individual member libraries to keep local tax dollars local. Governor Cuomo's 2015 Executive Budget proposed no increase in state library aid. During the budget process, our Senators and Assemblymembers heard and responded to the MCLS' message that "Libraries Are Education" in the Finger Lakes region and secured a \$5 million dollar increase statewide - the largest year-to-year increase in state library aid in seven years. Thank you for recognizing that libraries are an essential partner in education. This increase of 5.8% represents over \$121,000 in additional state aid to the MCLS. The total state aid to the MCLS and its member libraries is \$2.18 million this year, with \$1.36 million of this allocated for system services.

Systems create efficiencies and cost savings through shared online catalogs, databases, delivery systems and information technology infrastructure. The MCLS provides and maintains our telecommunications and network infrastructure, including digital transmission and internet access services via an internal network. Currently, the MCLS contracts for Metro-Ethernet fiber connecting 31 library sites to the MCLS Central site hub, averaging 15 megabits per second (Mbps) per site. Bandwidth is continuously evaluated given the volume of internet access, increased access to mobile multimedia, and streaming distribution of MCLS electronic resources through our library catalog. There are approximately 950 public and 680 staff computing devices maintained across the MCLS. All member libraries maintain free wireless access for patron-owned devices. We are fortunate to have fiber optic solutions that are scalable to grow services to our community that, similar to the rest of New York, are increasingly digital across multiple platforms. As a result of state aid increases, the MCLS increased bandwidth capacity at 20 locations this year and improved patron internet speed and availability across the system.

While our network is robust, we are straining against the growth of technology and online use, as well as the increasing shift of MCLS technology to hosted or Software as a Service solutions for internal operations such as email. We are planning for an environment when 1 Gigabit per site is a standard, as it is now in several Monroe County school districts and private organizations in our area. To that end, the MCLS is partnering with the City of Rochester, Rochester City School District and Monroe County to explore direct broadband solutions to City and County residents. The MCLS will be a partner organization in responding to the New NY Broadband Program, and will be part of a regional proposal to be submitted in February. As "Libraries are Education" in the Finger Lakes region, our municipal and school partners also recognize that libraries are essential in providing *#broadband4all*. While we are continuing to map potential solutions for wide public access in Monroe County, we know that this will require additional infrastructure and expanded bandwidth for all MCLS member libraries.

One reason libraries are an essential partner in providing broadband for all is how New Yorkers rely on libraries for both access to, and support for, use of technology. Several MCLS member libraries partnered with the Public Library Association in 2014 to survey our users on how they benefit from library technology. Our largest member, the Rochester Public Library, found of those who reported visiting the library in the past year, 97% used a public access computer or the library's wireless network during their visits. 68% of library technology users indicated they used library technology for employment needs; 53% applied for a job by submitting a resume or filling out an online job application. The impact of library technology is not just for job opportunities; 52% reported using library technology to get information on health and wellness topics. 30% of users reported learning about diet or nutrition; of those, 87% made a change to their diet.

Access to online information and services is complex, and 81% of public access technology users surveyed received help from a librarian when using the computers or Internet at the library. Of those users, 58% have access to the Internet at home, school, or work but still choose to use the library's technology. This shows the library offers critical resources and services even as people increasingly have their own Internet connections and devices. MCLS member libraries recognize that we are in a unique position to improve public benefit from technology use. Our libraries provide training on use of consumer health databases, English as a Second Language instruction, High School Diploma Equivalency or TASC tutoring, small business and patent research, and more. It is no longer just about searching content at libraries; the MCLS also provides opportunities for content creation, such as coding, website development, 3D printing, and recording and editing sound and video.

Library spaces are evolving not only to build out technology, but to reflect the collaborative and communal nature of how technology is shared in libraries. This year's state budget included a continuation of state aid for public library construction at the \$14 million dollar level. In the MCLS, these funds were most recently secured for the merger of two aged, non-code compliant town library branches into one central facility in the town of Irondequoit, opening its doors in September. Funding was also secured for the Fairport Public Library, who reopened their doors on Monday following an extensive renovation. These facilities were designed with the changing use of libraries in mind – multiple meeting and collaborative spaces, charging stations, wireless access in all areas, and self-service stations for checking out materials as well as printing and scanning documents. State construction aid is so critical to public library infrastructure in our part of the state. The \$14 million level of funding has not increased in 10 years, and is spread out across the entire state. The MCLS shares approximately \$566,000 between its member libraries each year, who collectively maintain over 732,000 square feet of facilities. Last year funding requests exceeded available funding by over \$1 million dollars.

I believe I am speaking to a supportive crowd, given your participation on this standing committee. It is my hope that this testimony provides a snapshot into how public library technology is benefiting the Finger Lakes region, and how we are striving for higher levels of technology support and access for our communities. The Committee should know that system aid has immediate impact; it sustains our technology services and maintains current infrastructure. However, state library aid, while on the rise, is still below funding levels from 2000. State library construction aid, flat since 2006, has not kept pace with general inflation, let alone increases in public works construction values in the last decade. Any return on investment in libraries is tangible, and measurable, as our member libraries are constantly assessing and tracking library use and the impact of that use. We will continue to advocate for libraries as education and libraries' provision of broadband for all in the coming state budget process. Thank you.