



540 White Plains Road, Suite 200
Tarrytown, NY 10591-5110
phone 914-674-3600
fax 914-674-4185
www.westchesterlibraries.org

To: Assembly Committee on Libraries and Education Technology
Re: Public Hearing – The Impact of the 2015-2016 State Budget on Public Libraries in
New York State
Date: November 6, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today concerning the funding of public libraries and public library systems in New York State. My name is Terry Kirchner and I am the Executive Director of the Westchester Library System (WLS), a cooperative public library system comprised of 38 member public libraries. All of these libraries are located within the geographic boundaries of Westchester County.

2015-2016 Public Library Funding

The New York State 2015-2016 funding appropriation for WLS and its member libraries is just over \$2.6 Million. The Local Library Services Aid portion of system funding payable directly to the member libraries is approximately \$268,000, or ten percent (10%) of the overall Library Aid allocation received by WLS. The member libraries use these Local Library Services Aid funds to support their operations and meet their minimum service standards – such as the number of hours that the library is open to serve the public.

The New York State Library Aid allocated to WLS is used to provide system-wide services to the communities served by our member libraries at no additional cost to the member libraries or their communities. These services include cataloging of materials; consulting and training services for trustees and staff; administering and coordinating of system-wide grants and purchases; shared access to over 5 Million books, DVDs and CDs; and outreach to and programs for underserved populations.

Examples of our outreach to underserved populations include activities such as: the Westchester Seniors Out Speaking and Senior Benefits Information Centers that provide information about Medicare and other government benefits to seniors and their caregivers; the career and educational counseling services at libraries that help individuals transition to new careers, reenter the workforce and start new businesses; the TASC Connect! project that pairs learners with trained volunteers so that they can more successfully prepare for and pass the high school diploma equivalency test in New York State; and Academic Help initiatives in libraries supporting after-school educational support programs staffed by trained teens who serve as role models for younger youth while gaining important job and life skills.

With the increase in funding that was received this year, WLS was able to move forward on several initiatives that helped our member libraries to better serve and engage with their communities. Declines in county funding highlighted the need for library staff to be better able to identify and work with individuals experiencing mental health challenges. Throughout

the past year, WLS has worked with local nonprofit partners to provide library staff with certificate programs in youth and adult mental health first aid. This initiative has helped to make libraries more accessible and welcoming to all individuals.

The additional funding also provided opportunities to support member library activities through the purchase of two system-wide educational streaming video resources: Lynda.com and University of Fashion. Lynda.com courses are taught by industry experts and focus on the improvement of business, creative, technology and personal skills. University of Fashion lessons are taught by fashion industry professionals and aim to inspire and educate students, teachers and the fashion curious. These resources have been integrated in existing makerspaces in libraries and fully support library staff efforts to teach, engage and create with their local communities.

State Aid for Library Construction

State Aid for Library Construction has allowed WLS member libraries to move forward on activities that they might not otherwise be able to afford. Approximately \$655,000 was available for WLS member libraries to use toward construction activities during the 2015-2018 time period. The construction funding requested was over \$1.2 million: there is a need for more funds to improve library facilities.

The matching construction grant awards have been used for a range of projects including the replacement of old roofs, library renovations for more efficient and ADA-compliant spaces, and upgrades and replacements to HVAC systems. All of these projects help the libraries provide their communities with safe, Wi-Fi compatible, comfortable places to learn, conduct business and engage with others. During recent weather events that left many communities and individuals without electrical power, people turned to the libraries to meet their essential needs for safety, comfort, information, and yes – technology.

Future Needs

The future is here and it is changing rapidly. Public library systems like WLS provide the technology training and support that allow libraries to meet the public's growing demand for downloadable electronic content; access to e-government forms and documents; computers for creating online resumes and submitting electronic job applications; and digital literacy training. Public library systems and public libraries provide an essential safety net for individuals no longer served by other institutions. The programs and services at libraries are geared to help individuals at all age and education levels discover new opportunities and learn new skills. With additional funds, WLS and the member libraries can help improve the quality of life for all of our communities. Well-funded public library systems and public libraries will foster the growth of stronger, better educated, and more economically independent communities throughout New York State – a win-win situation for all.

Respectfully submitted,



Terry L. Kirchner
Executive Director