



Pioneer Library System

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leading libraries forward

November 4, 2015

Assembly Committee on Libraries and Education Technology
Room 513M, The Capitol
Albany, NY 12247

Dear Committee,

I am the Executive Director of the Pioneer Library System, a cooperative library system providing shared services to the 42 small and rural public libraries in Ontario, Wayne, Wyoming, and Livingston counties. We manage an online library catalog that provides every resident in our four counties with access to over 1M library items, we deliver library materials to all 42 libraries, we provide continuing education to library staff and trustees, and we provide onsite technology support for libraries' computer and networking systems. Our libraries are an important part of the region's educational network, providing lifelong learning opportunities to community members of all ages.

Although state aid to the Pioneer Library System is still less than it was in 2000 and is still much less than required by State Education Law, last year's restitution of 4.8% in library aid allowed the Pioneer Library System to make important investments in member libraries' technology infrastructure. Libraries had been using inadequate and outdated wireless access points that required frequent tech support and were offering inconsistent wireless access. Pioneer used state aid to replace the old access points with the enterprise-quality access points necessary for busy public organizations like our member libraries. Even though free wireless access is one of the most crucial services provided by rural libraries in small communities, the sad truth is that individual libraries would not have been able to afford this upgrade on their own. Likewise, the System would not have been able to fund the upgrade on libraries' behalf without last years' increase in state aid.

The above success story illustrates the effectiveness of the Pioneer Library System in helping libraries to save money and increase services to the public. However, it also makes glaringly obvious the inadequacy of current library funding to meet the ongoing infrastructure needs of public libraries. The most pertinent example is the need for increased bandwidth for small and rural libraries. Almost all of our member libraries have

inadequate bandwidth levels, but because of the rural nature of the communities, there are limited options for bandwidth increases without huge investments in broadband infrastructure and high monthly bills to internet service providers that would exceed libraries' current budgets.

Furthermore, most of our member libraries are located in buildings that are over 100 years old. The buildings are beautiful and charming but they were not designed to meet the current needs of library users. For example, the Stevens Memorial Library in Attica has been longing to make its historic building fully ADA compliant, to create a meeting space for its community members, and to accommodate additional technology. The library has an architect's design and the community's support, but the library has been unable to secure the necessary funds. The library director even worked on a NYS Library Construction Aid application, but when the Board learned that there were not enough funds available through the Pioneer Library System to award the library with the 75% of its project costs for which it was eligible, the library had to withdraw its application.

Each year the Pioneer Library System receives less than \$378,000 in NYS Construction Aid to divide amongst its member libraries. This amount does not even come close to meeting the construction needs of our member libraries. This year, the system received grant requests totaling over \$744,000. The total cost of those projects is over \$2M. When adequate construction aid is not available, small libraries with modest budgets are restricted to using these funds for essential maintenance projects rather than for service-enhancing projects. The Wadsworth Library in Geneseo, NY was recently forced to choose between replacing its crumbling 100 year old wood floor or creating a new children's space. Because of limited funding, the library chose to replace its floor. Unfortunately, the desperately needed children's space project has been set aside.

Library systems in New York are the models of shared services. Investing in systems ensures that every resident, even if living in a rural community, has access to lifelong learning opportunities through her local public library. But in order for systems to continue to lead libraries forward into a strong and enduring future, we need adequate funding. We need adequate state aid for libraries and we need a significant increase in NYS Construction Aid funds.

Thank you convening this important discussion about library funding. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lauren Moore', with a long, sweeping underline.

Lauren Moore
Executive Director