

Remarks of:

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As local residents struggle with rising unemployment, rising prices and a faltering economy, they are increasingly turning to their local public library to help make ends meet. Overall use at Buffalo & Erie County Public Libraries (B&ECPL) has increased significantly, with several locations experiencing double digit increases in the number of visits, materials borrowed, attendance at programs and use of computers.

Through November 2008, use of free public access computers at B&ECPL libraries has increased more than 52% over 2007; we have logged 608,000 sessions at our public computers. At the flagship Central Library, year-to-date patron visits have increased 20%; we anticipate welcoming 500,000 people at the Central Library in 2008. Library patrons are taking advantage of our request system more frequently to have needed books and other library material delivered to the library closest to their home. For those without cars, it provides a vital link to information. For library users with transportation, that helps them save on what is currently the costliest gasoline in the country. Through November, the number of materials borrowed throughout the Library System is up 6%, representing more than 390,000 items and a total circulation of over 7 million items.

Cuts to library aide will require serious service reductions throughout our Library System, which will affect all 37 libraries in Erie County. Through books, media, computers, training programs, educational programs, workforce development programs, networking and resume resources and support, literacy initiatives and general referrals our libraries provide access to a wealth of services and materials that are critically important during this period of economic uncertainty, including assistance with job research, help with navigating social service agencies and programs, and continuing education. Any further reduction in State funding beyond what had previously been announced threatens the Library's ability to provide the services our community needs and deserves.

A cut of the magnitude Governor Paterson recently suggested, \$20 million, paired with the 2% reduction libraries have already taken, will amount to a loss of approximately \$600,000 for the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library System – approximately 20% of our State allocation. It comes at time when we are also facing a significant reduction in support Erie county support.

When times get tough, people count on us as a resource and as a safety net; we hope we can count on the Governor and the Legislature to help us be there for our residents. Please ensure that the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library System can continue to keep the doors open for our residents at a time when they need us the most.

And it's not just B&ECPL. All the Library Systems throughout the state are struggling. And Library Systems – similar in function to BOCES for the school systems – are already a cost

saving measure. Systems provide essential services such as integrated library systems, delivery, interlibrary loan services, materials handling, processing, centralized ordering, continuing education, and more.

Western New York is being hit hard; the Chautauqua-Cattaraugus Library System will be taking its Bookmobile off the road in June; primarily because of the lack of State aid.

Library Systems have not had an increase in statutory state aid since 1991 - and that increase was not fully funded until 1998. Consider the increases made to other agencies, particularly schools, since 1991. While we are being asked to sustain a series of cuts in the bad years, we have not subsequent increases in the good years. The cuts for libraries proposed by the Governor are real cuts for us, not just a reduction of a proposed increase as is the case with so many of the other agencies outlined in his plans to date.

Libraries know, all too clearly, that times are tough and everyone will take a hit. We've already sustained a hit; and most of us are looking at reductions at the local level, too. What really needs to happen is for governments to invest in their libraries as critical infrastructure. When times are tough, public libraries are used more and more and more. Like social services we operate in the inverse of the economy – people need us more when they have less.

In addition, let me point out that:

- Library aid has already been reduced from \$102 million to \$99 million
- Between 1998-2006, libraries received no funding increases at all
- Cutting Library Aid will fall heavily on the state's 73 library systems which are the backbone of our libraries and information infrastructure.
- If significant cuts happen in the 2008-09 or 2009-2010 budget, the collaborative services provided by the library systems will either be cut or the costs will be passed on to local libraries and their taxpayers; some Systems may fail, adding to the stress on local libraries and other Systems.
- Cuts mean that libraries could close at a time New Yorkers need them most.

I appreciate the opportunity to come before you today. Please ensure that we can keep libraries open for our communities in the coming years.

Thank you for your time.