



December 13, 2016

ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON LIBRARIES AND EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY

**Testimony on  
Funding Public Libraries**

The 36 member libraries of the Chautauqua-Cattaraugus Library System fill critical needs in rural communities and are active partners in education. They use their library system for free centralized services that provide them with a delivery service and an online catalog, shared databases, HR and legal support, professional development training, and IT support, among many other things. Our job as a library system is to make sure they can run efficiently and effectively even on a shoestring budget.

In recent years, tax cap limitations have exacerbated chronic underfunding, and our libraries increasingly look to us for centralized solutions to common challenges. Unfortunately, state library aid remains below 2007-08 levels, so our ability to maximize efficiency is limited. Every increase in state aid improves our ability to share services and resources, and find economies of scale so that every library is more effective and efficient in strengthening communities.

In 2016 the Chautauqua-Cattaraugus Library System implemented a central project to share broadband services across the two counties and secure federal E-rate funding on behalf of the libraries. The result is a system-wide network that provides high-quality, high-speed broadband to our libraries at a very low cost. Through this one project alone, we are saving our communities thousands of dollars while dramatically improving library services at the same time.

In our rural communities, it is not uncommon that over half of the students have no reliable access to internet at home. More and more, schoolwork requires internet access and the use of digital devices. I am proud that our libraries have stepped up to fill the gaps after the school doors close. They have partnered with their local schools to actively promote student success. With the support of their library system, our libraries can now afford to offer updated hardware, reliable wireless, and high-speed broadband so that everyone, young and old, can have equal opportunity to education, services, and opportunities.

At the Chautauqua-Cattaraugus Library System we can afford a single full time IT specialist, who provides assistance and maintenance at 38 locations spread out over a wide area. While he works tirelessly, lack of funding means that we can get nowhere near meeting the need from our libraries for adequate IT support. With increased state aid, we could provide every library with IT support to meet their needs so that they operate efficiently and effectively, taking advantage

of standardization and economies of scale and making sure a broken computer or a malfunctioning network is quickly fixed.

Like other library systems, we maintain a central eBook library that all of our libraries share and support. Every eBook can be checked out by any resident of our two counties. By sharing resources in this way, we avoid duplication of services and materials. This is made possible only with the support of library aid, and without it our libraries simply could not afford to offer eBooks.

Public Library Construction Aid continues to be a critical source of infrastructure funding for our libraries. Our libraries are housed in many beautiful old buildings that require repairs and modifications so that we can continue to meet user needs. Visits to our libraries continue to grow, especially for summer reading programming and after-school homework help. It is more important than ever that our buildings meet the needs of their communities and Public Library Construction Aid is a critical part of that.

Our libraries continue to provide computer classes, job skills training, health resources, social services, and many educational opportunities. Their services for children give families a jump start on education, keep summer learning fun, and give school children safe productive after school activities. They are cultural and educational centers of their community; they are places where people meet, where the unemployed look for jobs, where entrepreneurs do research, and where students receive homework help. Our libraries are the place where people seek help of all sorts, and we are proud of the amazing work they do day in and day out to provide that help and make their communities stronger.

On behalf of our 36 libraries, I thank you for your investment in our communities. It really does make a difference.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eli Guinnee', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Eli Guinnee  
Executive Director