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leading libraries forward

December 12, 2016

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

Dear Committee,

I am the Assistant 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.

To carry out their missions as part of the education system, our libraries must not only provide services and programs but maintain and grow a facility that supports their efforts to the community. With this in mind, most of our member libraries are located in buildings that are over 100 years old. These buildings are beautiful and charming but were not designed to meet the needs of modern-day library users and library services.

For example, the Walworth-Seely Public Library in Walworth, NY is a library that is quickly becoming a modern staple in the community. While they are a resourceful and flexible organization that can turn a limited space into a charismatic community destination, they cannot sustain their level of service with the current space limitations. Their long-range plan includes a goal of moving to or constructing a new library location to fit their needs. The library has done their due diligence in gathering input and buy-in so they know that this move is a community priority too. The issue comes with the cost of the project and their limited funds to make this goal a reality. While the NYS Public Library Construction Grant may offer some supplementary funds in the future, there is far from enough to be able to offer a full match to all requests - especially for projects like this one that will be particularly costly.

Another example with a similar funding situation is the Geneva Public Library in Geneva, NY. While they are not faced with the same space restrictions, they are dealing with a large, old building that is in desperate need of rehabilitation and renovation. They are a library that consistently applies for NYS Public Library Construction aid for small projects to support the needs of their building, but the work that needs to be done to their main floor circulation area, parking lot, and third floor computer and training area will cost significantly more than the library has in their capital fund. Geneva is reevaluating their projects and costs by developing a Capital Improvement Plan. However, the library director knows he will need to heavily rely on the NYS Public Library Construction Grant program in order to make these necessary improvements a reality.

The additional funds given to our system during this grant cycle \$512,365 (previously \$378,000) was extremely helpful. It allowed projects such as the Stevens Memorial Library in Attica to move forward on its previously halted (due to lack of funds) building project by allowing for ADA compliance, creation of a meeting space for its community members, and to accommodate additional technology.

While this increase was a great benefit to the Pioneer Library System and member libraries, the funds were short of supporting the full \$848,613 in requests from the projects across our system totaling over \$2M. Each year we receive more and more requests for funds through construction grant applications. This means without additional funds from the program, libraries like Walworth and Geneva will be unable to complete their necessary updates.

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

Sincerely,

Ronald Kirsop
Assistant Director
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