

**TESTIMONY OF PATRICIA A. TUMULTY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NEW JERSEY LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY BUDGET COMMITTEE
MARCH 16, 2011**

I am Patricia Tumulty, the Executive Director of the New Jersey Library Association. I am speaking today directly on behalf of the 1700 members of our Association and the 1500 members of the New Jersey Library Trustee Association. But more importantly, I am also speaking on behalf of residents of New Jersey who visited our public libraries over 48 million times last year. Over 170,000 people walk through our doors every day. I guess you can call these people “a special interest group” - the unemployed who use our libraries for job searching and unemployment assistance; students of all grades who use our electronic resources to complete educational assignments; the family who is seeking health information to make sense of a difficult diagnosis by a physician; the young father who wants to instill in his child the love of reading but can’t afford to buy the books; the entrepreneur looking for business leads through RefUSA and the millions who use libraries to improve their quality of life. They do not see the library as an amenity but rather as a community necessity.

Governor Christie’s Budget

The tone of my budget testimony today is much different from that which I gave last year. The FY11 budget proposed an unprecedented cut of 74% in library programs from \$ 10.4 million in FY10 to \$3.6 million in FY11. The residents of New Jersey reacted very strongly to that proposed cut by sending tens of thousands of emails and postcards to legislative offices. Through the efforts of many of you who were serving on this committee last year, our cut was reduced to 43%. Still extremely devastating but, at least, it allowed library programs to continue. This takes our funding level back to the 1970s when only books were required for library service- not computers, the Internet or electronic resources. This is at a time when library usage has grown dramatically. In two years, we have seen a 14.5% increase in the number of library materials borrowed (almost 64 million items) and an increase to 11.3% in the number of visits to our public libraries to over 51 million visits in one year. These numbers are staggering and currently the state’s contribution is just 91 cents per person per year.

The budget which you are now reviewing proposes no new cuts to library programs this year. For this the library community is extremely grateful. So why are you here, you might ask? I am here because you now have the ultimate decision over the budget. It will be your voice which will provide the final budget document which is presented to the Governor. Your decisions are critical to the library programs we offer. If you don’t believe in these programs, our remaining funding could easily be eliminated. We are well aware that this proposed budget could still be changed before June 30. We are seeking your support.

Where Are We Today

The funding which was restored last year permitted the continuation of the New Jersey Library Network. This network which has been operating for over 25 years joins the resources of public, school, academic and special libraries. It is a model of cooperation among entities providing for a variety of services including statewide interlibrary loan and delivery services, shared catalogue of library materials, and cooperative purchase of electronic reference materials. Through sharing of library materials over 3,000,000 items were borrowed by people using this cooperative system last year.

The funding ultimately for this program was at the FY2010 level of \$4.299 million, the program, however, was required to absorb several of the services provided by the Virtual Library program and the New Jersey Knowledge Initiative budget lines which were totally eliminated in FY2011 budget. Funding, which was restored last year, required significant re-configuration and scaling back of the NJ Library Network.

Libraries on the Frontlines - Developing Job Skills

We realize New Jersey is still in the midst of a difficult economic situation- in fact we see it every day. Public libraries are on the front lines when it comes to helping people with job searches, resume assistance and career advice. In a recent survey, 78% of NJ libraries say that their number one priority is helping jobseekers. Let me just introduce you to one such librarian. Last Dec. the *NJ Star Ledger* wrote an article called "*Recession Gives NJ Libraries New Mission.*" The article focused on Kate Baker, a librarian at the Piscataway Public Library. As Kate explained, "Almost half my day is devoted to job seekers." The article continues, "Much of her time now also is spent counseling individuals. The job seekers who come in are often middle-age or older, and many of them don't know how to use a computer mouse, much less Microsoft Word or Google. Sometimes people have been in the same jobs for so long, and they find themselves having to start over."

To help meet the growing demand, the library recently launched free monthly computer workshops, professional networking groups and one-on-one appointments for job seekers.

The Piscataway Public Library is not unique. These services are being offered by public libraries throughout New Jersey. Virtually every public library has focused on job and career training.

It has been suggested that I bring some job seekers with me to testify. Although I know their testimony would be more compelling, it is difficult for most people to attend so I am bringing you some of their stories.

For example, go to the front page of the Long Branch Public Library website and you will meet Sherry through her YouTube video. Sherry has been coming to the library for about two years. After she lost her job of twenty- three years, she realized she needed computer skills to get back into the work place. Her classes at the Long Branch Public Library have given her the ability to get a new job. As she says, "*The library gave me the skills to be in the twenty first century without being intimidated.*"

Or Jim Frank who said in an email, *“Please pass my gratitude along to everyone in the Gloucester County Library organization for the seminars you have been having for those of us who are (or were) unemployed. I recently landed a job after almost two years of unemployment. The classes I attended for resume writing, networking, job searching, and using library resources were most helpful.”*

Or Rosaria Carr who is presenting a program at the Scotch Plains Library’s Career Networking Group on March 28. Rosaria is an alumna of the group and participated in its activities for 13 months before landing her current job.

I wish I could have brought Sherry, Jim, Rosaria or the thousands of people just like them with me. But, they are either working, thanks to the help they found at their local library or busy using their local library to pursue employment, education or training.

To apply for any job today you need access to a computer and the Internet. It is the reality of the job market. Unfortunately not everyone has those basic job seeking tools. In more than 70% of NJ municipalities, the only free Internet access is at the public library. Access to the public library is essential for a large number of job searchers to be competitive in their job search. However, that access is seriously being compromised by budget cuts. Public libraries throughout New Jersey are cutting branches, curtailing hours, or furloughing library staff because of restricted budgets.

The examples are numerous: The City of Trenton has closed 4 of its 5 libraries; Montclair has closed its branch library; Newark Public Library had extensive furloughs last year; the Haddonfield Public Library furloughed its staff last year; the Jersey City Public Library rotates Saturday branch hours. These are just a few examples. Limiting these hours has a direct impact on the ability of local residents to compete for job opportunities. It is simple- if you can’t apply for the job you can’t compete.

Our Goals-Restoring State Per Capita Aid

Certainly, we can dream. As you review the budget restoring the 50% cut in state per capita aid to its FY2010 level to \$7.2 million would be our highest priority. It would provide public libraries with a small level of relief and help them maintain local services. This amount of money would not even bring this program up to its FY 08 level of \$8,665,000. It would however, be a significant start to restoring funding to our local libraries. This would give them some compensation for the tremendous expansion of library use which we have seen in the recent years.

Keeping Libraries Open for Job Seekers

If we could dream even more, we would focus on the communities which have the highest levels of unemployment and keeping them strong so that they can continue to work with those seeking employment. We are requesting \$ 5 million in aid to assist libraries which serve residents with the highest levels of unemployment in order to keep their facilities open, staff available, provide access to technology for job seekers and entrepreneurs.

Proud of Our Expanding Role

Our libraries are proud of our role as community anchors providing a wide-range of services to residents of all ages in New Jersey. My testimony could have focused on many of the services our libraries are offering- our expanding role in the area of government information, for example. Many of the forms which the state and federal governments are now requiring for the public to use can only be found online. If you don't have a computer at home to fill out the form online- you come to the library. But that is a story for another day.

It is our new role in the area of workforce training which is so critical today. Our state will recover from this recession and when it does, you will find thousands of individuals who have used the services of their local public library to give them the workplace skills for the twenty-first century. We are accomplishing this through the leadership of the New Jersey State Library which has obtained federal funding for partnerships with other agencies such as the New Jersey Community College Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development and the NJ Department of Labor and Economic Development. Keeping our libraries open to provide these services is critical. That is why we are asking for your continued commitment and support. Any additional dollars you could provide are essential to keeping library doors open.