

TO: NJLA LISTSERV MEMBERS

FROM: PAT TUMULTY, NJLA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

RE: LEGISLATIVE UPDATE, JUNE 22, 2007

First, what you want to know. Unfortunately, our efforts to get emergency resolutions passed yesterday in the Legislature to remove library funding from the levy cap were unsuccessful. It is my understanding that there will be continued talks about removing libraries through the waiver process which currently exists in the law. We will let you know what is happening as things progress.

Now, let me reflect on the past ten days here in Trenton. I will use that famous phrase, "It was the best of times and it was the worst of times."

On June 13, we became aware that funding for the Knowledge Initiative would be reduced by \$ 1 million, a very significant cut in this program. We also became aware that there was a resolution by Assemblyman Russo to remove municipal libraries from the cap levy through budget language. This is something which we supported. Both of these issues were critical to the library community. It just seemed natural that the State Library would take the lead in trying to restore the KI funding and NJLA take the lead with the cap issue. I testified on both of these issues on June 15, 2007. I will make sure that copies of my testimony are on the website shortly.

Susan Kaplan, the manager of the KI program, did an outstanding job organizing testimony regarding the impact of the funding reduction for KI. Supporters attended public hearings on the budget on June 15 and June 18. Unfortunately, no changes in the budget were made but the library community made an impression. Assembly Budget chairman Lou Greenwald said this is a program which really should be expanded and indicated that he would work with the library community on this important issue.

Now, the cap issue. On Friday, June 15, NJLA and the NJ League of Municipalities, through its Executive Director Bill Dressel, prepared a joint letter to Chairman Lou Greenwald indicating we supported the budget resolution to remove library funding from the cap levy. By the end of the day, we told this would not happen in the budget. On Sunday evening, we decided to try plan B and get an emergency resolution passed by both houses of the Legislature and signed by the Governor. This is an extremely difficult and unusual thing to do but we felt it was our only chance. On Monday, June 18th we started with no sponsors and no language but we felt we had legislative support.

I want to explain to you something getting things done in Trenton. You need the complete agreement of the leadership and staff in Assembly, of the leadership and staff in Senate and the Governor's office. If one of these groups doesn't want it to happen, it won't. As advocates, we often don't know who is actually making the final decision. We were very fortunate to get the support of Assemblywoman Bonnie Watson Coleman to sponsor a resolution in the Assembly and Senator Barbara Buono as the Senate sponsor.

We understand there was bipartisan in both houses of the Legislature. We had support within the Governor's office but, in the end, someone didn't want this to happen last night and without complete agreement it would not come forward.

I want to commend our partner in this effort, Bill Dressel, Executive Director of the NJ League of Municipalities. He was absolutely wonderful. This truly a partnership effort with both organizations sending out legislative alerts to our members on this critical issue. He was everywhere with us on this issue. I hope you will let your municipal officials know how much we appreciated his hard work.

Now, I want to thank all of you who took the time to call or fax your legislators to support KI funding and the cap levy issue. You truly raised the visibility of libraries here in Trenton this week. Please take the time to thank all of the people you contacted on these issues. Let them know their efforts on our behalf were deeply appreciated and that we will need them in the future to support library issues.

I am very disappointed with the outcome of our efforts this week but I am so proud of your efforts to advocate for library services here in New Jersey.

Ok, now into the car to drive to DC. I hope all of you who are going will travel safely. More updates soon and thanks again.