



**TESTIMONY OF PATRICIA A. TUMULTY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
NEW JERSEY LIBRARY ASSOCIATION  
BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY BUDGET COMMITTEE  
FEBRUARY 17, 2010**

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 160,000 people walk through our doors every day.

**FACE OF GOVERNMENT**

This has certainly been a difficult time for many residents of New Jersey. As the unemployment rate grew, we saw a dramatic increase in the number of people visiting our libraries looking for information on new job opportunities or career options. The demand for library Internet services also grew at a tremendous rate as many people found they could only find many job listings or apply for jobs if they had Internet access.

Those who needed to file for unemployment also found our libraries were a lifeline. Although you can file for unemployment online or at a One-Stop Career Center, countless New Jersey residents came to their public or academic library for assistance. Most did not have the Internet at home or had never filled out an online form. The library community partnered with the Department of Labor and Workforce Development to hold training sessions for librarians to assist those filing for unemployment. Over 100 librarians were trained and this initiative demonstrated the importance of libraries as local centers for access to electronic government information. As more and more state information is becoming only available on the Internet, the partnership between state agencies and public libraries must be strengthened in order to provide effective e-government services to the residents of our state.

To the public we are the face of government in the community. It is our role to link residents of a community to the information resources they need to assist in their daily life whether it is to find job and career information, health services, consumer guides or student research. During these difficult economic times, we are there to provide resources to help people get on with their lives.

In addition, this past year we also saw a dramatic increase in the use of the library by families who were seeking to find a community place to share programs and relax from

the stresses of a difficult economy. Families need to be together to have fun. Maybe they couldn't go on vacation this year but we could give some quality time in their own community.

### **FY10 BUDGET**

The budget which was adopted on June 30 reduced state funding for library programs 14.6% with just under \$2 million being eliminated from the previous FY09 state budget. These reductions were difficult to absorb

The budget "freeze" which Governor Christie announced on Thursday affects another \$721,000 in state funding to libraries. Added to the reductions we had already received this year, funding for library programs would be reduced by \$2,677,000 or over 19% in just one year. It will reduce the total support for library funding to under \$13,000,000- the lowest level of state support for libraries in decades. This is lower than our FY89 appropriation.

### **REAL IMPACT**

Obviously, all these budget numbers are important but what is vital is what these dollars provide for the residents of New Jersey and why these additional reductions are hard to understand.

First, funding for the New Jersey Library Network received the largest reduction at \$373,000 and when added to the reductions this program received earlier this is a 17% reduction in funding in one year. This program joins the resources of local libraries together into a coordinated program of cooperative services which can be shared by all residents of New Jersey. It provides a wide range of collaborative services to libraries such as interlibrary loan, delivery, training and cooperative purchasing. These services promote cooperation and coordination among local libraries. All of your local libraries are members of the New Jersey Library Network. In difficult economic times cooperation must be fostered not eliminated.

Second, funding for the award winning program New Jersey Knowledge Initiative has been reduced by almost 60% in one budget year. The goal of this program was to foster economic development and innovation by providing information resources needed by entrepreneurs and small business owners in order to permit them to compete in the global economy. This was a program designed to support business and scientific endeavors. As hard as it is for some to believe, I don't think the next great scientific breakthrough will be found just doing a Google search. Business, entrepreneurs and students need solid information resources to succeed. Just when we should be supplying resources for business growth- we are reducing them.

And the third reduction is in our Virtual Library program which supports programs such as shared electronic databases for the general public and supports our Jersey connect system which provides Internet access to a large portion of our public libraries.

Connections to the Internet are a fundamental component for library services and a lifeline for many looking for employment. This program also supports the ability of the public to use the library from home or work when the library is closed. We know many people were using the library during a recent record snow storm without ever putting their boots on. Unfortunately, reductions in this program pose a serious threat to the electronic connections which support our libraries.

### **A PERFECT STORM**

A recent publication by the American Library Association notes that nationwide a perfect storm is brewing- the demand for library services is increasing dramatically at the same time as our funding is continued to be eroded. This is exactly what we see in New Jersey. The public is coming in record numbers- they realize they need strong libraries and they need them now. If New Jersey is to recover economically, socially and culturally, we must support our libraries now more than ever.