



TESTIMONY OF PATRICIA A. TUMULTY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

NEW JERSEY LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY BUDGET COMMITTEE

MARCH 26, 2009

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 the millions of residents of New Jersey who rely upon local libraries as their centers for access to literacy and information services.

I am testifying in support of the funding for library programs administered by the New Jersey State Library. Since 1995, the State Library has been affiliated with Thomas Edison State College. That affiliation was made permanent with the passage of legislation in July 2001.

The challenges facing New Jersey are enormous. I know your goal for this budget is to provide funding for programs and services which the residents of New Jersey view as vital during these difficult times. In this recession, the public seeks services which provide opportunities to find new employment or development of new careers. They also seek programs which maintain the quality of life for themselves and their families.

I know Governor Corzine frequently mentions how the fallout from Wall Street impacts Main Street. It is very apparent that New Jersey residents are finding the best place on Main Street is the public library. The number of people using our services has risen dramatically over the past year. Do the public, the press and this budget view libraries as a critical service in today's economy climate?

Is the Library a Critical Service Now-the Public Says Yes

The public is coming to our libraries in record numbers. Every library I know is reporting major increases in the number of people visiting the library and the number of materials circulated. Recently, the NJ State Library and our Association sponsored an activity called "Snapshot Day" where we asked libraries to keep statistics on what was happening in our libraries on just one day. The numbers are astounding: 161,376 people walked through the doors; 156,793 books and media were circulated; 27,742 people used the computers and 1,245 people got employment assistance. All this in just one day.

In addition, we are hearing reports from individual libraries that they are seeing increases in usage from between 8-25% over the same period of time last year. Yes, the public thinks libraries are critical services.

Is the Library a Critical Service Now-the Press Says Yes

Since January approximately 20 news articles and editorials have been written focusing on the vital role of New Jersey's libraries during this economic downturn. The New York Times, the Star Ledger, the Asbury Park Press, the Courier-News, The Philadelphia Inquirer, the Record, and even small papers such as the Ocean City Sentinel and the Hopewell Valley News all have focused on the critical role of libraries. Let me tell you what the press has discovered. Their stories illustrate how the residents of New Jersey are using their libraries.

The NY Times New Jersey edition on March 15 reported that "In Maplewood, librarians observed so many people were asking for information about finding jobs that three weeks ago they began holding workshops on skills that longtime jobholders may never have needed before, like uploading resumes on Monster.com. We thought we'd be getting people who were looking for jobs at Home Depot the library reported, but instead we got all white-collar professionals."

On March 17, Richard Cowen reported in the Bergen Record, "When the going gets tough, the tough go to the library. The economic slowdown has led to a surge in library use as throngs of jobless people seek free help finding work, while budget-conscious families look for cheap entertainment." The article continues "Visiting the library has become Square One for many job seekers, who can tap into a wide array of books and online databases- all free. And libraries have also become ad hoc job training centers as people come in to learn new computer skills. Most libraries offer online free access to a variety of business databases to their cardholders. Cardholders can link up to these databases

through the library web site. The Wayne Public Library received 17.8 million hits in 2008, an astounding 56% increase over the

previous year. Among the most popular of these databases is Reference USA, a digital yellow pages that contains information about business and products across the nation. Reference USA is considered a valuable tool for job seekers and people who are looking to expand their business. It is available to local libraries through state funding, but that is now threatened by proposed cuts."

An editorial in the Asbury Park Press said it best. "Libraries are rarely more important than when the economy heads south, as patrons call on them for cheap forms of entertainment like reading a book or borrowing a video. But they play an even more crucial role when employment is scarce and personal finances are stressed by providing job seekers with key resources, be it educational texts or access to computers. Yes, not everyone is online, especially in the cities. It would be a sin for libraries to lose ground now, just as they've reached these new heights of popularity and importance."

A story in the Star Ledger by Lawrence Ragonese began, "The computer terminals lining the walls of the Morristown and Morris Township Library were all booked last Thursday afternoon, with other potential users sitting patiently at adjacent tables waiting for their turns. 'I've no choice but to wait,' said Roy, a Denville resident who needs to get online to check job listings. I've got to be able to use the Internet to check my e-mails and connect with employers. But I lost my job and couldn't afford to pay for my computer connection at home. So, here I am."

Another man named Terry interviewed at the Parsippany Library said "I use it extensively, but more since I've been out of work." He has been looking for work in the packaging, machinery and capital equipment fields. "I do a lot of research there. The staff is really helpful. But I also find the library can offer a respite from the worries of the day."

The Editorial in the Herald News says, "Public libraries have become more indispensable than ever. Local libraries, large and small, urban and suburban, serve everyone from latchkey kids to people who have lost their jobs. The latchkey children use the libraries as a safe place to do their homework. The unemployed, especially those without computers at home, use the libraries' resources to search for work."

Yes, the press thinks libraries are critical services now.

Is the Library A Critical Service Now-this Budget Says No

The public understands our critical role, the press understands our critical role but this budget does not. It proposes more devastating reductions for library funding. The way the budget reductions for library programs are presented in this budget is extremely deceptive. Our libraries relied on four major state funded programs- the state per capita aid program, the New Jersey Library Network, the Virtual Library program and the Knowledge Initiative. The roles of these programs are complementary. Each of these programs has received at least a 10% reduction in the budget. They are, however, listed separately in the budget documents so you don't get the overall complexity of these cuts. The cumulative reductions for library programs from FY09 to FY10 (including midyear reductions) are \$2,346,000 or a 14.42% from last year. When added to cuts already taken in the FY08 and FY09 budgets, library programs have been reduced by 22.76% in the last three years or over \$4,038,000. These are cuts in services which directly impact the public. In addition, the New Jersey State Library has also taken additional reductions in funding. These cuts will definitely mean reduced services and programs just at the time when the public needs these services the most. When you consider that in 1991 state funding for library programs was \$16 million and in 2009 state funding for library programs was also \$16 million it is clear that we have been doing more with less for almost 20 years. How many state services can you name that were funded in 2009 at the same level they were funded in 1991? Somehow we've managed, but these additional cuts, at a time when we are needed more than ever, are devastating to library service in New Jersey.

No, this budget does not view libraries as critical service.

FY10 STATE BUDGET

This state budget pledges to the people of New Jersey it will provide the critical services they need now to withstand this difficult economy time. I am sorry I couldn't bring Roy or Terry or any of the thousands of people using our libraries today. They are busy trying to get on with their lives under very difficult circumstances and they are at the library.

The public knows the critical value of libraries, the press knows the critical value of libraries- please show them the Legislature knows it by restoring the cuts in library programs in the FY10 budget.