



**TESTIMONY OF PATRICIA A. TUMULTY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NEW JERSEY LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY BUDGET COMMITTEE
MAY 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 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 in this difficult economy but rather as a community necessity.

BLINDSIDED BY ELIMINATION OF PROGRAMS

Who could come before you and not acknowledge that this is one of the most difficult budgets ever faced by governmental leaders in New Jersey? All programs were told to anticipate cuts – and so were we. Nothing prepared us to tell the public that many of the library services they have come to expect would be totally eliminated by Governor Christie’s FY11 budget.

The budget which you are reviewing for library programs cuts funding a staggering **74%** reduction in one fiscal year. This is a loss of over \$10.4 million and will jeopardize our eligibility for future federal funding in the amount of \$4.5 million. It totally eliminates funding for 3 of the 4 state library programs supported through state funding and cuts the one remaining program by 50%. Our funding level has been reduced to what it was in the early 1970’s – 40 years ago.

Every dollar of state support for programs which provide coordination, cooperation or sharing of library resources on a statewide basis have not been reduced – these programs have been eliminated from this budget. They are simply gone without any discussions on the impact to the residents of New Jersey. Programs which have created a statewide system of sharing library materials and cooperative purchases among libraries which has been vital to the success of New Jersey libraries for over 25 years. These services will vanish.

The elimination of these programs defies what the Governor is encouraging all governmental entities to do- work cooperatively and effectively together through sharing of resources.

Library funding had already taken incremental cuts in the previous three budgets presented by Governor Corzine going from \$17,742,000 in FY07 to \$14,094,000 in FY10. We were not one of those programs which had expanded its state funding in the past few years, in fact, in FY10 we are looking at approximately the same total funding level for libraries as there was in FY89. I have attached a chart showing library funding for the past several years.

What has grown tremendously since the beginning of this recession is library usage- in 2009 there were over 51 million visits to local libraries up over 11% since 2007. That number would fill the new Meadowlands Stadium 620 times in one year. There has also been an increase of over 14% in the number of items borrowed from local libraries to over 63,000,000 million last year. In addition, our computers are being heavily used every day – many of those users are those unemployed looking for new jobs or students trying to keep competitive with their classmates because they have no computer at home. In 78% of our communities the public library is the only place of free Internet access.

Yet, with all this demand for service, our funding is being decimated.

WHAT HAS BEEN LOST

Three entire programs have been eliminated by this budget- **New Jersey Library Network, the Virtual Library Program and the New Jersey Knowledge Initiative.**

These programs joined the resources of public, school, academic and special libraries. Services eliminated include the statewide interlibrary loan and delivery services. Last year over 3,000,000 items were borrowed by people using this system. As local budgets get reduced this service becomes more important to local libraries. Other cuts include:

- Shared catalogue of library materials for statewide use- gone
- Electronic resources for public, academic and school libraries- gone
- Cooperative purchasing of library materials- gone

Without state funding it will now fall on the local community library to provide these services from its budget or, unfortunately, not offer them at all to their residents. For example, one of the most popular resources is called *RefUSA* which provides information on thousands of local businesses. It is used extensively by small business owners and job seekers. The cost for one library to buy this is \$22,000. This would be impossible for most local libraries to provide.

WHAT'S LEFT IN THE STATE BUDGET FOR LIBRARIES?

The only library funding which has remained in the FY11 budget is funding for the state per capita aid program which provides assistance to local public libraries for meeting state standards. Funding for this program is proposed at \$3,676,000 million which is a 50% reduction from the FY10 appropriation level. This program was funded at \$8,665,000 in FY08. So the overall reduction for this program is over \$5,000,000 in three years. This is the funding which helps the local library keep the library open and buy

materials. It is a small part of many budgets but in this economy every dollar is significant.

I know you will hear testimony from many groups that funding for their programs are at its lowest levels in 15 years. This takes our funding level back to the 1970s when only books were required for library service- not computers, the Internet or electronic resources.

SAVE MY NEW JERSEY LIBRARY

The Public Responds

Since the announcement of this devastating budget for libraries on March 16, we have relied on the public to let you know how they feel about the importance of continuing strong state support for NJ libraries. The New Jersey Library Association launched an effort we called “save my nj library” to inform the public of the implications the elimination of these programs would have on local library service.

We are gratified with the overwhelming response we have received. The public clearly understands and values their libraries.

For example, over 13,000 individuals sent 52,000 email messages to their members of the legislature and to the Governor. I am fairly confident that you each have received many of these from your constituents. Even the Governor acknowledged that he had heard more about libraries than any other issues.

We also asked the public to sign postcards in their local libraries to protest these cuts. I have attached a sample to my testimony. We are currently counting them and dividing them into legislative districts so we can deliver them to your offices. In a little less than a month we collected approximately 60,000 postcards in libraries all over the state. You will be getting these soon.

And, in early May we held a rally in front of the State House Annex. This was definitely a first for the librarians and our supporters with hundreds attending. Yes, we did have to endure some jokes about the quiet librarians raising our voices but our message was very clear.

The Media Responds

We have also been very fortunate to have wonderful coverage by television and the press on these cuts. The media has visited libraries throughout the state and have given New Jersey residents the opportunity to tell their stories directly about the devastating implications these cuts will have to local libraries. The public understands what these cuts will mean to them.

Through this budget process I have been moved by letters sent to the media by NJ residents. Let me share a few with you. They speak more eloquently than I on the value of libraries.

Stacy from Rockaway wrote to the Daily Record to say:

"Like many, our family has fallen on hard times and has less money than we need to get by. The library system in Morris County has been a lifesaver. Without it, we would not have a place for our children to do their homework or access the Internet for job searches, civic participation and other interests.

In hard economic times, the public libraries are key to the survival and recovery of individuals, families and communities. They are one of the few sectors that should be spared cuts, as they are a lifeline for those seeking to improve themselves and be productive citizens. The services that libraries provide for free are critical and would not be affordable to many people if they had to be purchased out of pocket."

Or the letter from Michael of Berkeley Heights

"I'd like to voice my strong opposition to Gov. Chris Christie's proposed cuts in library funding that would reduce state aid by about 75 percent. It could result in the reduction, if not the elimination of many important library services, including interlibrary loans and free internet service, on which many people depend.

Take my own situation. I use the computers at my local library for the internet because I cannot afford to pay the monthly service fees. This very letter was written on the computer at my public library. While using the computer at my library is not essential, it is important.

These suggested cuts are unacceptable. They are a prime example of being penny-wise but dollar-foolish. I understand that cuts are necessary in these hard economic times, but 75 percent is unreasonable.

Municipal public libraries are a vital service of our towns and should not be shortchanged in funding."

Or a letter from MaryAnn of Phillipsburg,

"Libraries create and fulfill a sense of community. They create a haven for students who utilize computers to do research on school projects; job seekers completing online resumes and seeking out job opportunities; town residents who may have questions about health issues, tax-related questions, etc. The list goes on and on and on.

Communities such as Phillipsburg use their libraries extensively. It is a lifeline of knowledge and information for many. With budget cuts running this deep, it will be devastating to the community and its residents. And, once lost, I feel it cannot be regained."

Restoration of library funding has also received strong editorial support from *The Record* which concluded:

"Public libraries are able to offer the services they do by their model use of shared services, an idea much in fashion these days. Libraries buy services, like databases, at a much lower rate because they buy them collectively through state funding. If that money goes away, each little municipal library will pay far more for those databases and will be left to pick and choose what it can afford.

Doctors pledge to care for the sick. Librarians' work is to care for the mind, which means enlarging a person's field of learning. These cuts would force libraries to drastically narrow that field and take away benefits for the common good.

No government should ask that."

PUBLIC NEEDS AND WANTS STRONG LIBRARIES

It is very clear that libraries will not be able to provide strong statewide services if you agree with this 74% cut in the FY11 budget. The budget is now in your hands. We urge you to restore the funding which has been eliminated so that these vital programs which create a strong statewide, coordinated library system will be saved.

Every year I am asked if the Internet will kill libraries. Now, almost 20 years after the first public library connected to the Internet, the answer is still clearly NO. But lack of governmental support and commitment most certainly will. How sad if that happens at a time when we are needed more than ever before by the people of New Jersey.