

## Statement on Monroe County Library System Funding

New York library systems have provided essential, collaborative services to the residents of New York State for more than 50 years which have saved municipalities hundreds of thousands of dollars. Today, the buzz words in state government are consolidation and merger – bringing together similar operations and providing more cost-effective delivery. Library systems have done this for decades and should be acknowledged as the model for the type of consolidated government being touted by our governor. Instead, our library systems are slowly eroding due to annual reductions in state aid, effectively slowing, halting or reversing the savings achieved by our collaborative model of governance.

In Monroe County, our 20 member libraries have been required to increase the amount they spend on system services such as computers, internet access, integrated library system software, delivery, outreach to the elderly and disabled, and much more. Our members are drawing funds to pay for increased system costs from local budget lines for materials, programs, staffing, and hours, resulting in fewer direct services provided to our residents.

Since 2007, the Monroe County Library System budget has been reduced by nearly \$1 million, while system services have continued to be in high demand. The technology services provided by the Monroe County Library System have allowed our members, during the peak of the recession, to help hundreds, if not thousands, of people look for work and teach themselves new skills. For many users, the public library is their only source of computer or internet access, both required commodities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century job search.

Library staff continues to do what we always do: cooperate and share expertise and resources among our libraries in the forms of training and materials sharing. When one library can't afford to buy a popular material, it is still available to the residents of that town through another library in Monroe County via the services provided by the system. When one library can't offer computer training, its patrons can take advantage of training in any of the other MCLS libraries because of the reciprocal services agreement brokered by the library system.

Library systems provide the structure upon which all our members operate. The value provided by the system to its members in the area of technology is significant. The provision of an integrated library system network (including an online catalog and circulation software) plus internet access saves our local municipalities and their libraries hundreds of thousands of dollars every year. Reduced support from New York State aid has forced MCLS to increased member costs by as much as 15% in order to maintain the level of service required by our users. Any further increases to member libraries would be devastating at this time and could result in some libraries choosing to withdraw from the system. If that happens, the existing model for consolidated public service in Monroe County and in New York will start to collapse, certainly an ironic occurrence in light of the governor's push for consolidation of services.

I urge you to restore and stabilize state funding to libraries and library systems. Do not allow a cost-efficient, collaborative model that works to disintegrate.