



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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National Library Week, April 10-16, 2016 ~ New York Library Association highlights strong state budget for public libraries ~ Thank you to all of our local libraries for your tremendous contributions

THOMAS F. O'MARA April 12, 2016

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The underlying importance of access, of course, points directly to the critical role played by our public libraries to encourage students and their families to read, and as the gateway for making books and other reading materials and programs available throughout our communities.

Albert Einstein once remarked, "The only thing you absolutely need to know is the location of the library."

Perfect words to keep in mind as we continue to celebrate National Library Week this week (April 10-16).

Sponsored by the **American Library Association** and libraries of all types across America (school, public, academic and special), the week has been devoted to recognizing "the contributions of our nation's libraries and librarians and to promote library use and support."

The good news, according to a statewide poll last year the Siena College Research Institute, is that it appears more and more New Yorkers know how to find their local library -- and they think it's important.

According to the poll:

- > library usage is up 10% statewide, with usage up by 20% for lower-income households;
- > three-quarters of poll respondents called public libraries "very important" to education and information access;
- > nearly 70 percent have utilized the resources of a public library in the last six months; and
- > a clear majority believes that state aid to libraries should be increased.

On this last point, the recently enacted 2016-17 state budget includes \$95.6 million in state aid to public libraries. That's a \$4-million increase, and it's important progress representing the highest aid level since 2008, according to the New York Library Association.

Similarly, the new budget also includes \$19 million, or a \$5-million increase, for State Library Construction Aid. Library Construction Aid has proven invaluable to many individual libraries across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and statewide, to help them upgrade their facilities in a variety of ways. According to the New York State Library, which administers the grants, surveys reveal that public library construction and renovation needs statewide total more than \$2.2 billion. Nearly 50% of public library buildings across New York are over 60 years old. Another 30% are more than three decades old. Many of the state's local public libraries are unable to accommodate users with disabilities, cannot provide Internet and computer and other electronic technologies to users because of outdated and inadequate electrical wiring, do not have sufficient space to house the library's collection, and lack sufficient space for public access computers.

The construction grants help libraries and library systems make renovations and upgrades, update electrical wiring to accommodate computer technology, renovate facilities to provide wheelchair accessible entrances and become fully accessible to persons with disabilities, and provide community meeting rooms.

Assemblyman Palmesano and I sponsored a new law last year that addressed one shortcoming in the construction aid program by allowing libraries to access this funding for the installation of broadband services. That wasn't accommodated under the previous program, but it needed to be – particularly for libraries in rural areas and smaller communities where they're often the No. 1 point of Internet access. Libraries are the leading digital literacy educators in New York. That role will only expand in future years. Expanding library aid in this fashion would be an investment in economic growth and workforce development, in New York's overall educational and cultural well-being, and one that will produce a substantial return by making an enduring, positive difference for so many local communities.

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Read more from the New York Library Association, "[NYLA 2016 Budget Priority -- State Library Aid](#)"

So we thank all of our area libraries this week -- and throughout the year -- for the tremendous contributions they make to our communities.

Visit the website of the Southern Tier Library System, www.stls.org, for links to member libraries in Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben and Yates.

The members of the Finger Lakes Library System, including Tompkins County, can be found online at www.fls.org.