



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Local public libraries awarded state grants ~ O'Mara, Palmesano, Friend say grants will help libraries undertake renovations, upgrades

THOMAS F. O'MARA June 30, 2016

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Elmira, N.Y., June 30—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats), Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning) and Assemblyman Chris Friend (R,C,I-Big Flats) announced today that public libraries throughout their legislative districts have been awarded state library construction grants.

The area legislators said that the grants are being awarded through New York's Library Construction Grant Program, which was provided \$14 million in the 2015-16 state budget to allocate this year's awards. In the 2016-17 state budget, the Legislature and Governor Andrew Cuomo increased funding for the program to \$19 million and those awards will be announced next spring.

"A public library is a fundamental resource for area families, seniors and countless other community residents. We're hopeful that these grants will help local libraries better afford and address their renovation needs," O'Mara, Palmesano and Friend said in a joint statement.

According to the New York State Library, which administers the grants, a recent survey revealed that public library construction and renovation needs statewide total more than \$2.2 billion. More than 50% of the over 1,000 public library buildings across New York are over 60 years old. Another 33% 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users with disabilities, cannot provide Internet and computer and other electronic technologies to users because of outdated and inadequate electrical wiring, do not have sufficient space to house the library's collection, and lack sufficient space for public access computers.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.

O'Mara, Palmesano and Friend announced the following grants to area libraries:

> **Steele Memorial Library** (Chemung County), \$101,736 to improve energy efficiencies;

> **Southern Tier Library System** (Steuben), \$34,886 to construct nearly 4 miles of fiber to nine member libraries to improve Internet connectivity; and

> **Cohocton Public Library** (Steuben), \$7,932 for energy efficiency upgrades.

In 2015, O'Mara and Palmesano sponsored a new law (Chapter 480 of the Laws of 2015) to, for the first time, include "installation and infrastructure of broadband services" as a specific project category eligible to receive funding through the Library Construction Grant Program. Prior to the law's enactment, libraries were unable to access funding through the popular grant program specifically for broadband purposes including cable, wiring and modems, and network terminals and access points.

About the new law's impact on enhancing the grant program, O'Mara and Palmesano said, "Public libraries, especially in many rural, Upstate communities and regions, are New York's leading digital literacy educators. That role is likely to expand in future years and this new law will help more and more of our public libraries stay ahead of the curve to continue to meet the increasing demand. It's an investment in education and economic growth."