

CHAIR  
LIBRARIES

COMMITTEES  
CIVIL SERVICE AND PENSIONS  
COMMERCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
AND SMALL BUSINESS  
EDUCATION  
HIGHER EDUCATION  
NYC EDUCATION

NEW YORK  
STATE  
SENATE



SENATOR IWEN CHU  
17<sup>TH</sup> SENATE DISTRICT

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February 8, 2024

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins  
President Pro Tempore and Majority Leader  
188 State Street, Room 907, LOB  
Albany, New York 12247

Dear Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins:

We write today to respectfully request an increase in funding for our public libraries in the Senate FY2024-2025 one-house budget proposal.

Continuously evolving institutions that adapt to meet the changing needs of their patrons, our libraries provide critical services, education, technology infrastructure, and access to information to over 19.5 million New Yorkers statewide, including more than 10 million who hold library cards. As community anchors open to all, they support working families and vulnerable populations that offer no-cost access to materials and services like broadband internet, extra-curricular youth programming, and expansive collections of print and digital media that are otherwise out of reach for many patrons.

While the inclusion of \$102.1 million in State Aid for Libraries, \$34 million for Library Construction, and \$3 million in Governor Hochul's Executive Budget are welcome steps in the direction of adequate funding for library operations in New York, they still neglect to meet true community need.

For many years the Senate Majority has championed adequate funding for New York State's libraries and library systems, and we believe it is imperative that it continue this tradition in FY2025. To this end, we are requesting the following support:

**State Library Aid:**

The FY2024-2025 Executive Budget proposes to increase funding for State Library Aid to a total of \$102.1 million. However, State Education Law currently requires \$104.6M in statute; in the last 15 years alone, State Library Aid has received \$154M less than what is statutorily owed. Though libraries and systems have proven themselves adept at leveraging resources and stretching the value of every dollar they receive, surging operational costs and emerging hurdles are testing even the most established libraries' abilities to maintain current services, including delivery, eBook access, and literacy programming, at their present levels of operation.

The State Library Aid program is the primary source of funding for New York's library systems, which provide shared services and resources to each library in New York. These system services ensure that every

community, and every New Yorker, regardless of relative wealth, has access to quality library materials and services. According to the State Education Department, every dollar invested in the State Library Aid program yields seven dollars' worth of local library services. We request the Senate increase funding for the **State Library Aid to \$147.1 million.**

#### **Library Construction Aid:**

The State Aid for Library Construction Program grants individual libraries access to state funding to help leverage local funds and fulfil critical infrastructure needs at library facilities. These projects range in scope from core structural needs to HVAC modernization, ADA compliance projects, broadband access, and innovation of services. These projects are largely not possible without the support provided by construction aid and would not occur without it.

For the first time since FY2016, the Executive has proposed maintaining State Aid for Library Construction at its current level rather than advancing a sharp cut. While this is an encouraging start, the fact remains that the New York State Library's estimated statewide need for library construction has surged from \$1.5 to \$1.75 billion since this time last year.

Investment in the Library Construction Aid program must be increased to address aging infrastructure, energy-inefficient buildings, and the evolving ways that patrons use their libraries. Last year, the Enacted Budget included \$34 million for Library Construction Aid, which finally allowed libraries to prioritize badly needed repairs. Keeping this allocation flat at a time when libraries need capital investments the most is unacceptable and we request the Senate increase funding for the **Library Construction Aid program to \$69.4 million.**

#### **Library Materials Aid:**

The Executive Budget fails to raise existing levels of Instructional Materials Aid. Instructional Materials Aid includes library materials, textbooks, software, and hardware – and as of last year, digital materials. Aid for each is critical to ensure students have access to educational materials and technology.

Since 1994, the per pupil rate for library materials has only increased by \$4.25 bringing eligibility of school library purchases of up to \$6.25 per pupil for those attending public and nonpublic schools within their boundaries for such materials. This level has remained flat since 2007 while costs for hardware, software, textbooks, and library materials have increased substantially. According to the most recent data available from the School Library Journal, the cost of a new hardcover book purchased by a School Library now averages \$26.25. therefore, we request the Senate support amending State Education Law to increase the rate of **Library Materials Aid to \$11.00/pupil.**

#### **NOVELny:**

NOVELny is an online suite of databases and digital resources featuring hundreds of magazines, journals, newspapers, maps, charts, research, and reference materials available to all New Yorkers free of charge. Without action, the New York State Library will run out of funds to operate NOVELny on June 30 of this year.

Since its inception in 2000, NOVELny has become embedded in public, school, and academic libraries, and is woven into lesson plans and curriculum maps across New York. While the set of resources would be

financially out of reach for most of New York's libraries if obtained independently, by purchasing centrally with state contract rates we can ensure equity of access to high quality reference and research materials for all New York State residents.

The Executive Budget includes \$3 million for the continuation of NOVELny, a level also articulated in the New York State Board of Regents' Budget and Legislative Priorities for the 2024-2025 school year. We ask the Senate support this proposed spending of **\$3 million for the NOVELny program**.

By addressing the above-mentioned needs, we will be helping to ensure that our public libraries can continue to operate at levels that meet the needs of all patrons in their communities. On behalf of our public libraries, library systems, and patrons, we thank you for your continued efforts and look forward to working with you and our colleagues to ensure our libraries remain a cornerstone of collaboration, awareness, equity, and education for all New Yorkers now and in the future.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Senator Iwen Chu  
Senate District 17

The following Senators also sign in support:

Jamaal Bailey, Neil Breslin, Jabari Brisport, Leroy Comrie, Jeremy Cooney, Kristen Gonzalez, Peter Harckham, Michelle Hinchey, Brad Hoylman-Sigal, Robert Jackson, Brian Kavanaugh, Timothy Kennedy, John Liu, John Mannion, Rachel May, Shelley Mayer, Zellnor Myrie, Jessica Ramos, Gustavo Rivera, Sean Ryan, Julia Salazar, James Sanders, Jessica Scarcella-Spanton, Luis Sepulveda, Jose Serrano, James Skoufis, Toby Stavisky, Kevin Thomas, Lea Webb

cc: Senator Krueger  
David Friedfel  
Eric Katz