



The Voice of the Library Community

New York Library Association

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S7093 (Chu)

An act to amend the education law, in relation to project costs for buildings of public libraries located in economically distressed communities

The New York Library Association (NYLA) supports the above referenced legislation.

If enacted, this bill would amend Education Law § 273-a(4) to eliminate existing limitations on the amount of Library Construction Aid that library systems are allowed to allocate to projects eligible for aid greater than 75% of their total approved project costs.

Library Construction Aid is formula-based funding allocated annually in the State Budget for the use of public libraries and systems for construction, renovation, rehabilitation, or acquisition of new space. Other eligible or unique projects include broadband installation, emergency generators and security systems.

60% of annual funding is available solely for member library projects. That 60% is based on population served. The amount received by each system for its member libraries is no greater than the ratio of the population served by the system to the population of the state as a whole. 40% of each year's funding is available for use by the library system and/or its member libraries and is divided equally among the 23 public library systems. Each library system receives the same amount.

Currently, Education Law § 273-a(1) allows state aid to be provided for up to 50% of the total project approved costs for building of public libraries that are not located in economically disadvantaged or distressed communities, up to 75% in economically disadvantaged communities, and up to 90% in economically distressed communities. However, Education Law § 273-a(4) limits the allocation of aid greater than 75% by prohibiting library systems from awarding such funds in an amount greater than 50% of their systemwide aid apportionment.

The 50% cap hinders library systems from exercising local control in effectively leveraging funds and halts important projects at libraries in economically disadvantaged and distressed communities. Systems know their libraries and communities best and should have the ability to direct funds where they are most needed.



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Each year, the 50% cap contributes to the inability of systems across New York to utilize the full amount of funds allotted to them. Unused funds from one system are reallocated to others with the capacity to use them, a process that sees regions deprived of funding intended for the betterment of their communities. This issue impacts systems across the state from year to year and is not specific to any one region.

In other cases, the 50% cap discourages libraries and systems with match eligibility greater than their system's cap value from even applying for funding. The Warsaw Public Library, part of the OWWL Library System in western New York. The Warsaw Public Library was constructed in 1904 as a Carnegie Library and, according to OWWL Library System Director Ron Kirsop, is in "dire need of updating and expansion" to ensure safety, security, and ADA accessibility.

Despite a poverty rate, median household income, high school graduation rate, higher education rate, and education outcomes that place it in the bottom half of all NYS school districts that would qualify it for a 90/10 Library Construction Aid match, the library would receive less than the total funding it would be potentially eligible for because the cost of funding that match would exceed 50% of the total LCA funds the OWWL System received. As such, the library ultimately withdrew their application and delayed the project indefinitely as the community cannot afford the project without the match for which it is eligible.

The primary role of library systems is to effectively leverage funds within their systems to best support their member libraries. Eliminating the 50% cap would allow systems the ability to use their expertise and fully fund projects to the level of support that they are eligible to receive under state law.

For these reasons, the New York Library Association urges the legislature to pass S7093.

For additional information, please contact Max Prime at the New York Library Association at 518.432.6952.