



NORTH COUNTRY LIBRARY SYSTEM

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To: Library Trustees, Directors and over 145,000 registered Library Patrons
From: Steve Bolton
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The New Yorkers for Better Libraries Political Action Committee has recently released their first Voter's Guide. The guide rates the performance of State legislators in relation to budget and legislative support for libraries. It is available on the NCLS and New York Library Association (www.nyla.org) web sites. Legislators were graded based on budget and legislation votes that support libraries.

This is a new venture for libraries, though many organizations publish similar guides. State Legislators may express dismay or surprise at this action and their ratings. So why do this now? State Legislators from all parts of New York continually convey their admiration and support for libraries, and many use Member Item grants to help. But, because the amount of money that each Legislator has to distribute varies greatly, Member Items were not included in the grades. **All libraries need, and deserve, support that helps deliver essential services to library patrons.**

In 2007 State support for libraries was \$102.8 million.

Included in this is money for public, school, college, hospital and correction facility libraries. Here is the recent budget record for New York State Legislators:

- The State Legislators cut libraries twice in 2008. A 2% cut in the regular budget and an additional \$874,020 in August to bring support down to \$99.9 million.
- Libraries received a small cut in the regular 2009 budget, but when the State Senate and Assembly reconvened in December 2009, they increased the Governor's suggested 10% cut for libraries to 12.5%. Funding fell to \$86.8 million.
- Libraries have received two cuts in 2010: a 2.8% cut in the regular budget, and an additional 1.1% that was placed in a Contingency Allocation Plan. The 1.1% will be distributed if NYS has a budget surplus, so this is another reduction.
Support for libraries has now dropped to \$83.6 million.
- Library support was cut SIX times in the past three State budgets for a total of 19%.

State Legislators may say that other segments of the budget have received deeper cuts in the past three budgets. But, other parts of the general and State Education budget received generous increases for the past 12 years, while libraries were left behind. \$83.6 million returns overall funding to the level received in 1997. \$83.6 million, when adjusted for inflation from 1997 to 2010, is \$113.8 million in today's dollars. This fact highlights the purchasing power that has been lost by cuts and flat budgets.

Because the funding is spread among many types of libraries, the funding for your cooperative, NCLS, fell back even further.

Last year State Legislators advised that we submit legislation that would help libraries, but would not cost anything. The NYLA Legislation Committee did that. The results are outlined in the Voters Guide.

Even when the legislation would cost nothing, State Legislators did not act to support libraries.

One piece of legislation in particular would have helped NCLS libraries immediately. NYLA proposed changing the match amount for Construction Grants from 50/50 to 75% grant / 25% local library. The amount of State funding would not change, only the distribution would be affected. Raising 50% for a construction grant is difficult for libraries, and because the match was not changed to 75/25, NCLS will be forced to return \$124,000 to Albany – money that could have stayed in our area and been used to improve your buildings.

Cuts to libraries are counterproductive for our communities. Consider the following:

- Libraries are a service used by people of all ages, representing all economic situations.
- The number of times people visit libraries has increased by 39% in the past six years.
- People go to libraries for help with resumes and job searches. Libraries help people who are trying to help themselves!
- Businesses increasingly require people to apply for jobs online. People without computers or internet connections go to their libraries to apply for jobs.
- Borrowing between libraries has more than doubled (144%) in the past six years.

What has the gradual loss of support meant to your cooperative services?

- In 1998 NCLS had a book budget of \$126,000, and added to the area's collection. Today, adjusted for inflation, this would be \$169,854, but the budget line stands at \$0. *Your book budget had to increase to absorb this loss. Has it?*
- The popular cash Incentive Grants were discontinued last year.
- In 1998 NCLS had 33 employees. We now have 21. This affects everything we do.
- NCLS used to pay mileage for attending meetings. Your library now does that.
- Some of our Delivery routes are filled to capacity. We should be expanding this service to meet demand, but cannot. Will we ask library patrons to borrow fewer items????
- Libraries used to order materials through NCLS. They were shipped to NCLS and we added jackets, cataloged them and delivered them ready to go on the shelves. The cost of this service, with labor and processing materials, was passed down to your library.
- Despite making reductions and losing employees every year since 1998, NCLS will have a budget deficit of well over \$100,000 in 2011.

P.S.: If library supporters remain silent or politely express dismay, library funding will be cut in the next legislative session. That is the track record - that is what history has taught us.

Libraries have received mid-term cuts in November for the past two years, and the Legislature may reconvene soon, so we must be vigilant.

*It is time to communicate absolute frustration and outrage. **Speak up – and speak loudly!***

Contact information for State Legislators can be found on the NCLS web site (www.nclsweb.org) under the Advocacy menu.