To: New York State Division of Budget

From: Rebekkah Smith Aldrich, Executive Director

Date: July 10, 2024

Re: In support of S 7903-A / A 9076-A

The Mid-Hudson Library System supports the above-referenced legislation.

If enacted, this bill would increase the ability of our system to support economically distressed communities throughout the Hudson Valley through the State Aid for Library Construction Program.

Currently we are limited in the amount of program funds that may be assigned to lower the match requirement in under resourced communities. Given the high level of competition for these funds in our system – this year we have a 23 member libraries requesting over $15 million from the program, our allocation is just over $1.6 million – our ability to ensure that libraries serving economically disadvantaged and economically distressed communities get amounts that truly enable them to do the work necessary on their facilities is currently hamstrung.

While all communities depend on their local public library for many services, library facilities in communities classified as economically disadvantaged and economically distressed often have a different relationship with their community. They are often the only choice, that last hope, for folks that struggle to afford broadband connectivity or air conditioning during extended heat waves. These are services that are basic human rights and depend on facilities able to meet the demands of their community in the context of modern technology and the impacts of climate change.

In addition, public libraries are critical social infrastructure that have never been more important. As we consider how to strengthen our communities and overcome the divisive nature of modern civic engagement what is clear is that public, non-commercial spaces, where the public good is as the heart of the mission is what today’s world is yearning for. Public Libraries are the answer. Non-partisan spaces with trained information professionals who create inclusive, welcoming environments in these facilities may be what changes the course of history for the better throughout our state.

While this bill may seem minor in the landscape of bills the Governor is reviewing, we’re asking that it be prioritized. It is a small administrative change that can have a generational impact on libraries serving communities where some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers reside.

Thank you for your attention and for all you do to help New Yorkers thrive.