

Eight Cordis Street  
Wakefield, MA 01880  
8 October 2007

Robert Maier, Director  
Mass. Board of Library Commissioners  
Boston, MA

Dear Mr. Maier,

I was unable to attend Thursday's hearing in Worcester on the proposed 2009 budget for the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC), and I would like to submit my comments by letter. I am writing not only as a trustee at the Lucius Beebe Memorial Library in Wakefield, which has a population of approximately 25,000, but also as the President of the Mass. Library Trustees Association (MLTA). In the former capacity, I am intimately familiar with the impact the MBLC's budget has had on one library's ability to serve its community over the past decade. In my role with the MLTA, I travel around the state, meeting and talking with trustees from cities and towns large and small, and frequently receive phone calls and emails from trustees seeking advice on their local issues. Through this contact, I have become aware of the impact the MBLC and its six regional units have had on hundreds of libraries.

Due to its anticipated impact on my library and others in the Commonwealth, I must strongly object to the MBLC's "FY2009 budget request within cap," which lists a bottom line of \$32,975,780. The MBLC has struggled to serve the people of Massachusetts with inadequate funding since the turn of the millennium. Its budget was cut in FY02, deeply slashed FY03, and cut again in FY04. The small increases in the FY05-08 budgets still not restored the MBLC to its FY01 (pre-cut) levels. In an industry whose primary expenses are personnel, publications and technology, the rising costs of healthcare, energy and inflation have far outpaced the amounts voted by the legislature.

The MBLC's tagline, "strong libraries are essential to education and lifelong learning, to economic development, to strong communities and to a strong democracy," is true. But so is "a well-funded and well-staffed MBLC is essential to the development and sustenance of strong libraries in Massachusetts."

Therefore, and without reservation, I strongly support the MBLC's "FY2009 Legislative Agenda" proposed budget of \$43,623,416. I will attest to the impact of four specific accounts: Administration (9101), State Aid to Regional Public Libraries (9401), State Aid to Public Libraries (9501) and Library Technology and Resource Sharing (9506).

First, I applaud the re-inclusion in account 9101 of the 3 professional positions that had to be eliminated *in* FY03 due to the drastic cuts made to the MBLC budget: Trustee Liaison, State Aid Specialist and Library Development Consultant. In my position, I am most familiar with the loss of the Trustee Liaison, and the fact that this job has had to be handled since 2003 by Maureen Killoran, who already has a full portfolio as the MBLC's

Head of the Public Advisory Unit and Government Liaison. I don't believe that a week goes by where I am not either in a meeting with, calling, emailing or referring someone else to the MBLC Trustee Liaison. With nearly 2550 library trustees statewide, a funded and filled Trustee Liaison post is just as crucial to us as the Government Liaison post is to the state's 199 state legislators, 45 mayors and 1173 selectmen. The guidance and support received by trustees from the Trustee Liaison position has been invaluable to many of us, and could not be obtained from any other governmental agency or private association.

I heartily approve of the increase requested for account 9401, State Aid to Regional Public Libraries. The 15% cut this account suffered in 2003, followed by years of level funding has hampered the ability of the state's libraries ability to serve the citizenry. The directors of our regional library systems are to be commended for taking the fiscal belt-tightening actions necessary to stay within the budgetary limits set by the legislature. Yet, they can only do so much when costs keep increasing but their budget stays static. This is not to belittle the programs and services they have offered - their Herculean efforts and achievements are certainly to be commended. However, the regional library system is vital to local public libraries - without the workshops and continuing education opportunities offered to library staff (and open to trustees!), the interlibrary loan and delivery services, database access and cooperative purchasing programs, to name just a few of their services, we would be much less able to serve our community. My local library utilizes all of the above named services and opportunities. We cannot afford these services without the state's help, nor can we do without them. This is probably one account that even with its \$3 million increase may still be under funded.

Without a doubt, my library is dependent on account 9501, State Aid to Public Libraries. With state aid, we get recompensed for our circulation of materials to non-residents, which comprises over 25% of our total circulation. As our neighboring communities certainly don't contribute directly to our library's budget, this is the only way we are paid for providing service to out-of-towners. This money once went into a rainy day fund, but now is an essential component of our materials budget. Our finance committee inquires about it every year when we have our local budget hearing, and looks for its inclusion in our projections.

Lastly, account 9506, Library Technology & Resource Sharing, is very important to us. The ability to identify, locate, request and obtain information and publications from other libraries via our networked catalog and the interlibrary loan delivery service is fundamental to our patrons. Although Wakefield is a fairly urban, middle class community, we would not be able to provide our residents with a computerized catalog and online linkages to the collections of the rest of the state's libraries without the MBLC and account 9506. Library patrons demand faster access to electronic information at their local libraries, and so we cannot just rest on our past achievements, but must keep current with changes in technology. Some libraries of the state, particularly in western Mass., still cannot afford to join their local network, and do not even have broadband service, and thus their library users do not have equitable access to the information resources of the Commonwealth.

This account was nearly wiped out, reduced in over 90% in FY03. What have the reductions in account 9506 meant to my local public library? It's meant that the costs for programs and services, which were already in place, such as the network that makes our online catalog possible, were shifted to our local municipality. Our town does not have a large and growing industrial or corporate base, and we are nearly built-out, so there's very little new construction possible on which to gain new taxable income. Our local library, like our town, exists on a rather lean budget, one that is not sufficient to accept these pass-along increases without making hurtful cuts elsewhere, such as in personnel or materials (books & journals). Therefore, the costs we had to pick up had a major impact, and we had to hold the line in some areas, defer purchases in others, and make significant cutbacks. This affected everyone —the young who are ready to learn to read, those preparing for or in college, those who lost one job and needed information on retraining or possible jobs, the senior citizens who can not afford to purchase leisure reading materials or movies for home viewing.

We need a strong public library hi Wakefield, and hi every town and city in Massachusetts. I support your work in vigorously advocating for a well-funded MBLC, which will make strong libraries possible.

Sincerely,

Cindy A. Schatz  
Library Trustee