



October 4, 2007

Robert Maier
Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners
98 North Washington St., Suite 401
Boston, MA 02114

Dear Mr. Maier:

I am speaking to you today in my capacity as Assistant Director of the Haverhill Public Library and as a longstanding citizen of the Commonwealth. I have worked for this widely respected institution for 17 years and have experienced first hand the impact of state and municipal funding on library programs and services. The Haverhill Library has always believed passionately in the "give them what they want" philosophy. We have developed extensive popular library collections, which we actively share with other Massachusetts libraries. We maintain a large, busy computer lab with over 200 users per day, and serve as an after school community center for children and young adults. We offer opportunities and hope to the economically and socially disadvantaged, and, we are the library of choice for more than 1000 library users per day.

Over these many years the city of Haverhill has struggled economically, as have many cities and towns in Massachusetts. Four years ago with the city in financial straits the library was threatened with closure. Our library patrons and supporters flooded City Hall, to tell their stories to the City Councilors; stories that made us laugh and weep and smile with pride. One patron from Eastern Europe speaking in halting English, talked of what a library means to a free democracy and when the library disappears, so does our freedom. Another patron talked through tears about his lifelong struggle to read. Some expressed their desire to move away from the city if the library closed. And so many simply told of what an immeasurable value it is to them to be able to borrow books from virtually anywhere. Although we were saved and our doors remained open, our troubles since that time have only deepened.

We have sustained a 25% cut in staffing despite a surge in use. Indeed attendance in the library has skyrocketed even as we cut hours - no Sundays, no Wednesday nights, opening at 10:00 AM; and even as we cut services - no computer classes, minimal library outreach, limited teen and children's programs, no programs for seniors. We hire temporary staff, use volunteers, and work together like a family in crisis, filling in for each other, switching schedules as needed. We meet each morning to determine how we are going to staff our departments and most importantly, to bolster our spirits. Perhaps our most treasured resource, our renowned Special Collections Department, currently is closed. This is no way to run a library.



H A V E R H I L L
PUBLIC LIBRARY

Before closing I wish to make a special plea for the inner city youth, who we see after school each day. The Haverhill Library hired an adolescent behavior specialist over nine years ago to help us work creatively and proactively with our troubled and troublesome teens. Along with our dynamic young adult librarian we offer a culturally rich environment, a community place for young people to access the Internet, to enrich their lives, to learn how to learn. Urban libraries play a unique and underappreciated role in the lives of many children, and especially so for our at-risk youth.

When we think about the future of libraries we worry that there is no future. Our institution contributes to an intelligent and informed populace; offers hope and opportunity for everyone; and is the embodiment of our free and open society. I urge our legislators and our governor to fully fund all budget line items that support public libraries.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

Sincerely,

Susan Katzenstein
Assistant Director
Haverhill Public Library