

# LIBRARIES: AN ECONOMIC ENGINE FOR OUR FUTURE

“Libraries will get you through times with no money better than money will get you through times with no libraries.”-Ann Herbert

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In an age of greed and selfishness, the public library stands as an enduring monument to the values of cooperation and sharing. In an age where global corporations stride the earth, public libraries remains firmly rooted in local communities. In an age of widespread cynicism and distrust of government, the tax-supported public library has widespread, enthusiastic support.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Morris, David. “The Public Library Manifesto: Why Libraries Matter and How We Can Save Them.” *Yes Magazine*, 2011. <http://www.yesmagazine.org/happiness/the-public-library-manifesto>.

## Introduction

During the Great Depression, public libraries grew across the country. <sup>2</sup>

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One of Erie County's greatest assets is its public library system. The system includes modern buildings like the Frank E. Merriweather, Jr. Library on Jefferson Street as well as the classic design of the City of Lackawanna's branch. In fact, the building housing Lackawanna's branch was donated to the City of Lackawanna by one of our nation's greatest industrialists: Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie recognized the importance of libraries so much that he donated money to build one in the city that was home to one of his greatest competitors, Lackawanna Steel. Lackawanna, which did not previously have a public library, received a Carnegie grant and was one of the last Carnegie libraries constructed.

Erie County, as well as our country, has a long history of supporting public libraries. In fact, from 1800 to 1980 there was continued growth among America's public libraries, including vigorous growth during the Great Depression, from 1930 to 1940. <sup>3</sup>

In Erie County, during our current recession, County Executive Chris Collins –admitting that he does not use libraries<sup>4</sup> – has proposed a major alteration to our current county library system. Chris Collins has decided that, like many county services, he wants to force the library system to live on its own or simply die.

Collins created a funding crisis by specifically targeting the county's library system for drastic cuts at the same time he refused to spend tens of millions of dollars of federal stimulus assistance and increased the salaries of some of the county's highest paid employees. For the 2011 budget, Collins cut \$4 Million from the Buffalo and Erie County Library System. <sup>5</sup> After public outcry and hard work by our legislators, \$3 Million was restored to the 2011 budget. <sup>6</sup>

Now, Chris Collins, citing that he believes the library system is not fiscally stable, has proposed a plan that would create a new special taxing district for the library system, thereby creating a new level of government and bureaucracy, without also examining the potential ramifications of such action. <sup>7</sup> Those ramifications include several hidden evils that will result in more government,

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<sup>2</sup> Seavey, Charles A., "The American Public Library during the Great Depression" *Library Review* vol. 52, no. 8, 2003. <http://www.desertsailor.info/libraries/the-american-library-and-the-great-depression/>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> "Back the library plan." *Buffalo News*, 2011. <http://www.buffalonews.com/editorial-page/buffalo-news-editorials/article461584.ece>.

<sup>5</sup> Sommer, Mark. "Special taxation district proposed to fund the county's library system." *Buffalo News*, 2010. <http://www.buffalonews.com/city/communities/erie-county/article277852.ece>.

<sup>6</sup> Spina, Matthew. "Legislators approve money for libraries." *Buffalo News*, 2010. <http://www.buffalonews.com/city/communities/erie-county/article292504.ece>.

<sup>7</sup> "Back the library plan." *Buffalo News*, 2011. <http://www.buffalonews.com/editorial-page/buffalo-news-editorials/article461584.ece>.

more administration, high salaries, more taxes and further burden placed on the backs of Erie County's residents. All of this as a result of Collins created crisis.

The "Poloncarz For Erie County" Campaign conducted an analysis of the economic impact of libraries. The campaign also looked at the Buffalo and Erie County Library System in its current state, reviewed the Collins' plan and defined what it means to create a special taxing district.

Mark Poloncarz's plan to save Erie County's library system is based on bottom-line results pertaining to the economic impact of libraries and is carefully crafted in order to show that we must preserve our library system and enhance its services, while avoiding the creation of another layer of government and not placing a new tax burden on Erie County residents. This report uses academic and policy reports, scholarly articles and fact-based data to show already proven approaches and pragmatism in order to maximize the benefits of our library system for Erie County taxpayers, without forcing a new tax on them.

This report illustrates that Americans receive a return on investment in their libraries and Erie County residents cannot afford another layer of government with more administration, more salaries and more duplication. This report should be used as a template for further discussion, analysis and, ultimately, cooperation between community stakeholders towards creating a better library system.

This report will show the residents of Erie County the faults of the Collins' plan and prove to them why Mark's plan to preserve and enhance the current system will have a greater economic impact on our local economy without placing further burden on the taxpayers of Erie County. Mark Poloncarz is a champion of our libraries and he will not allow Chris Collins to fix the problem Collins created by further burdening our friends and neighbors.

Ultimately, *Libraries: An Economic Engine for Erie County* will show the worth, in terms of revenue generated, of public libraries, specifically the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library System.

## **Libraries: Community Assets and Economic Engines**

In reference to library funding cuts, noted author and attorney Scott Turow wrote, “This... threatens to destroy a network of public assets that remains critical for our country.”<sup>8</sup> In our current economic downturn, libraries have pulled their weight immensely and produced direct and indirect economic benefits for communities across America.

The American Library Association recently released its 2011 report, *The State of America’s Libraries* which included several figures relating to the direct and indirect economic impact libraries have on municipalities and communities.<sup>9</sup> Conducting studies to assess the value, in terms of revenue generated, of libraries is fairly new and is being undertaken across the country to show the significance of libraries when many states and local governments are unfairly targeting libraries for cuts, and in some cases closure.

Also included in the ALA’s *The State of America’s Libraries* is data from a Harris Interactive poll conducted in January 2011, commissioned by the ALA. The Harris Poll is expansive and shows trends, in comparison to 2010, of library use among specific demographics.<sup>10</sup>

The Harris Poll shows that even in our current economic downturn, the so-called “Great Recession,” library use has increased, as unemployed individuals and cash-strapped Americans are recognizing the essential role that libraries are playing in helping people find employment or start a business and cut costs on items such as DVDs, CDs, and of course books.

In 2011, many of the hours at branches in the Buffalo and Erie County Library System decreased as a result of funding cuts forced by Chris Collins.<sup>11</sup> This is despite the fact that Americans who have been negatively affected by the recession are more likely to use libraries and find greater value with both the library and the assistance provided by library staff. Gate counts and circulation across the country show that libraries are in higher demand now than ever before and taxpayers are not willing to let their neighborhood educational and research hubs bear the brunt of budget cuts.<sup>12</sup>

The Harris Poll was conducted to identify library trends and the study showed that library use is up from 2010. As identified in Chart I below, nearly 80% of Americans believe that their public

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<sup>8</sup> “The State of America’s Libraries: A Report from the American Library Association.” [http://www.ala.org/ala/newspresscenter/mediapresscenter/americaslibraries2011/state\\_of\\_americas\\_libraries\\_report\\_2011.pdf](http://www.ala.org/ala/newspresscenter/mediapresscenter/americaslibraries2011/state_of_americas_libraries_report_2011.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Id.

<sup>10</sup> “January 2011 Harris Poll Quorum.” Public Libraries. Harris Interactive, 26 January 2011. <http://www.ala.org/ala/research/librarystats/2011harrispoll.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> “2011 Patron Door Counts.” Buffalo and Erie County Public Library. <http://www.buffalolib.org/aboutthelibrary/statistics/2011/Patron%20Door%20Count%202001-2.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> “Perceptions of Libraries, 2010: Context and Community.” Online Computer Library Center. [http://www.oclc.org/reports/2010perceptions/2010perceptions\\_all.pdf](http://www.oclc.org/reports/2010perceptions/2010perceptions_all.pdf).

library deserves more funding and the same number of Americans agree that public libraries are critical to American democracy.<sup>13</sup>

Chart I: Significant Findings from January 2011 Harris Poll Quorum<sup>14</sup>

<b>79% of Americans believe their public library deserves more funding</b>
<b>80% of individuals asked said that they believe that public libraries are critical to American democracy.</b>
<b>94% believe that the public library plays an important role in giving everyone a chance to succeed.</b>
<b>65% of those polled said they had visited a library in the past year.</b>
<b>Women are more likely to visit libraries than men – 72% versus 58% - especially working women, working mothers and women between the ages of 18 and 54.</b>
<b>58% of those surveyed said they had a library card and among those with a card, women were the largest group. College graduates and individuals with incomes greater than \$100,000 were well represented among the 58%.</b>
<b>31% of adults and 38% of seniors rank the library at the top of their list of tax-supported services. 57% of people ranked the importance of libraries, in terms of tax-supported entities, in the middle of their list.</b>
<b>91% (up 5% from last year) place great value in a library’s provision of information for school and work.</b>
<b>93% of Americans believe that library services, which are free, are essential.</b>
<b>70% of those polled said they are extremely satisfied with their public library.</b>

In releasing his 2011 budget, Erie County Executive Chris Collins cut funding to our libraries by \$4 Million and when the independently elected Erie County Legislature restored the funding he cut, Collins vetoed the Legislature’s efforts and then reluctantly agreed to restore only a portion of the money. Chris Collins did this at the same time that a vast majority of Americans believe that additional funding should be provided for their libraries.

The Harris Poll also asked respondents to rank services by value. Chart II below notes an important trend in the public’s view of libraries between 2010 and 2011. From this table, you

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<sup>13</sup> “January 2011 Harris Poll Quorum.” Public Libraries. Harris Interactive, 26 January 2011. <http://www.ala.org/ala/research/librarystats/2011harrispoll.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Id.

will see that in every category, from 2010 to 2011, there was an increase in respondent’s feelings of importance concerning services offered by libraries. <sup>15</sup>

Chart II: Level of importance of services provided by libraries

SUMMARY TABLE OF TOP 2 BOX: Somewhat/Very important		
2010	2011	
%	%	
91	93	Services are free
86	91	Provides information for school and work
87	90	Is a place where I can learn for a lifetime
84	89	Enhances my education
83	84	Serves as a community center
79	83	Is a source of cultural programs and activities
76	83	Provides computer access, training and support
73	75	Provides accurate and up-to-date health information
69	75	Provides accurate and up-to-date financial information
61	70	Helps in starting a business
66	67	Helps in finding a job

Many individuals are also turning to libraries in order to use the internet for job searches and the ALA reports that computer usage at public libraries continues to grow. The availability of internet service in public libraries is approaching 85% and nearly two-thirds of libraries extend wireless access for users outside the library. Libraries also continue to adapt to our rapidly evolving technology and many public libraries, almost two-thirds, now offer e-books. E-books are the fastest growing segment in libraries. <sup>16</sup>

Of those surveyed in the Harris Interactive Poll, 58% said they had a library card, and among those with a card, women were the largest group. College graduates and individuals with incomes greater than \$100,000 were well represented among the 58%. Chart III shows the percentages among different demographics of those with library cards.

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<sup>15</sup> Id.

<sup>16</sup> “The State of America's Libraries: A Report from the American Library Association.” [http://www.ala.org/ala/newspresscenter/mediapresscenter/americaslibraries2011/state\\_of\\_americas\\_libraries\\_report\\_2011.pdf](http://www.ala.org/ala/newspresscenter/mediapresscenter/americaslibraries2011/state_of_americas_libraries_report_2011.pdf).

Chart III: Who has a library card, and who goes to the library <sup>17</sup>

Most likely to have library card	Most likely to have visited the library in past year
Working mothers (81%)	Working mothers (88%)
Working women (78%)	Working women (78%)
Postgraduates (77%)	Women aged 35-54 (77%)
Women age 18-34 (75%)	Postgraduates (77%)
College graduates (71%)	Those with some college (74%)
Women (70%)	Women aged 18-34 (74%)
Household income of \$100,000+ (65%)	People in the Midwest (73%)
Democrats (65%)	Women (72%)

In 2010 the U.S. Conference of Mayors reported that library hours, staff and services were the number two budget reduction item targeted, second only to maintenance at parks and gardens.<sup>18</sup> The University of Pennsylvania Fels Institute of Government conducted a review in 2010 of Philadelphia’s library system titled, *The Economic Value of the Free Library in Philadelphia*.<sup>19</sup> This report was created in order to assess the economic impact of the system at a time when many localities are unfairly turning to libraries to plug their budget holes.

The study showed that the Philadelphia library system created more than \$30 million of economic value for the City in 2010 and that the library system had a strong impact on business development and employment. The report concluded that an estimated 8,600 businesses could not have been started, sustained or grown without the resources provided by the Philadelphia Library System. The Free Library of Philadelphia had a direct economic impact of \$4 Million on the City of Philadelphia.

Approximately 1,000 people said they found work thanks to the library resources, pumping \$30 Million in salaries into the Philadelphia economy and \$1.2 Million in tax revenue into the community. Philadelphia homes located within a quarter-mile of a library branch were worth an average of \$9,630 more than homes outside a quarter-mile. The report says that this shows the presence of a library is associated with larger real estate tax revenues.<sup>20</sup>

The positive economic impact of libraries is not confined to Philadelphia. For example, individual studies have determined that (1) in Florida for each dollar of taxpayer money spent

<sup>17</sup> “January 2011 Harris Poll Quorum.” Public Libraries. Harris Interactive, 26 January 2011. <http://www.ala.org/ala/research/librарystats/2011harrisрoll.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> *The Economic Value of the Free Library of Philadelphia.* University of Pennsylvania Fels Institute of Government, 2010. [http://www.freelibrary.org/about/Fels\\_Report.pdf](http://www.freelibrary.org/about/Fels_Report.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

on libraries, communities received \$6.54 in benefits; (2) in Wisconsin its library system estimated a \$4 benefit for each \$1 in taxpayer money; (3) in Indiana for every \$1 in taxpayer money, over \$2 are returned; and (4) in Vermont for every \$1 spent on libraries they get \$5 back in return on their investment.<sup>21</sup>

In regard to Vermont, the State of Vermont Agency of Administration conducted a 2006-2007 study titled, *The Economic Value of Vermont's Libraries*.<sup>22</sup> Significant data was discovered that showed the direct economic impact of all Vermont public library expenditures is just under \$17 million – this is the amount public libraries spent in their communities and in the state in 2006-07.

Vermont public libraries bring to the state from federal and private sources approximately \$5 million each year. The value of loans and use of books, videos, cassettes, CDs, newspapers, magazines, etc. to Vermont public library users each year is nearly \$48 million. The value of public library reference services to Vermont public library users is approximately \$3.5 million.

The total direct economic impact of Vermont public libraries is estimated at more than \$75 million, while the actual cost of these services to state and local governments is only \$14 million. This means that for every \$1 spent by state and local governments on Vermont public libraries, the return on investment is \$5.36.

The indirect economic impact of Vermont public library expenditures – wages, supplies, books and other materials, construction, etc. – on the state's economy is approximately \$26.6 million. This means that for every \$1 expended by Vermont public libraries, the state receives \$1.90 in indirect economic impact. Thus, total direct and indirect return on investment for every \$1 expended on the state's public libraries by Vermont state and local governments is \$7.26 (State of Vermont, 2006-2007).

As will be shown below and as determined by the Buffalo and Erie County Library System, the return on investment in Erie County also shows that our taxpayers are receiving their money's worth: for every \$1 spent on the libraries, Erie County sees \$6.07 in return.<sup>23</sup>

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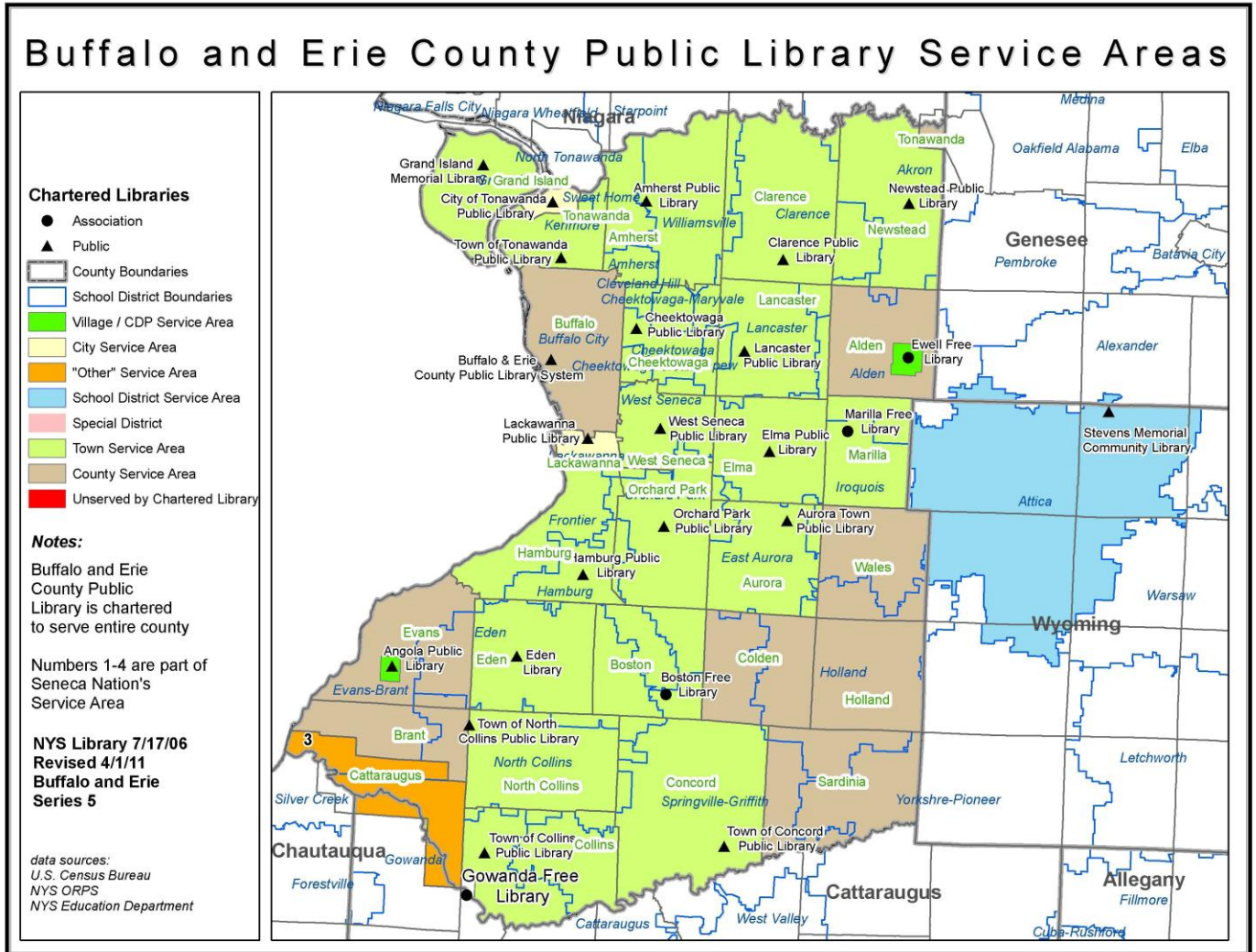
<sup>21</sup> Morris, David. "The Public Library Manifesto: Why Libraries Matter and How We Can Save Them." *Yes Magazine*, 2011. <http://www.yesmagazine.org/happiness/the-public-library-manifesto>.

<sup>22</sup> "The Economic Value of Vermont's Public Libraries." State of Vermont, Agency of Administration, 2006-2007. <http://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/misc/plvalue06-07.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Erie County Taxpayers: Your Return on Investment in the Library. Buffalo & Erie County Library. <http://www.buffalolib.org>.

## The Buffalo & Erie County Library System

The Buffalo and Erie County Public Library consists of a Central Library, eight branches in the City of Buffalo and twenty-two contracting member libraries which operate twenty-eight facilities outside the City of Buffalo. The map below entitled “Buffalo and Erie County Public Library Service Areas” describes what the library system looks like in Erie County. <sup>24</sup>



Prior to the Collins' administration, our library system performed an analysis and determined that the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library system returned \$5 plus in revenue per every \$1 dollar and the free, taxpayer supported services offered by our libraries produced huge savings for our county residents. Erie County taxpayers saved more than \$4.5 Million in 2006 by accessing library databases for magazine articles. By borrowing books, magazines, CDs and DVDs from our libraries, residents of Erie County saved more than \$112,000 and saved more

<sup>24</sup> New York State Library. Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.  
<http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/libs/publibs/3buferie.htm>.

than \$16,000 by using computers at the library. By attending programs sponsored by the library, Erie County taxpayers saved over \$700,000 in 2006.<sup>25</sup>

Under Chris Collins' leadership, our library system has been thrown into disarray, with little confidence for steady funding year-in and year-out. For a service so widely respected by Erie County's residents, and for a mechanism that generates so much positive return on taxpayer dollars, it is troublesome that the County Executive would create such a problem. Even more troubling, is that Chris Collins' solution to his own problem is to bog down residents with more government and new taxes.

When the Poloncarz campaign called the Cheektowaga Public Library to see if there had been any studies conducted of the economic impact of Erie County's library system since 2007, the library was closed due to reduced hours. As far as we can tell, there have been no studies to determine the economic benefit of libraries since 2007. Chris Collins took office in 2008.

Our county's libraries serve entrepreneurs and small businesses, community members and job seekers, families and the elderly. Our libraries are a staple in our community and the economic impact on our community from the libraries is immense and helps to expand our workforce and economy.

From 2001 to 2004, total county support for our libraries increased each year to \$28,697,118 in 2004. After the "Red-Green" fiscal crisis, funding increased again in 2007 and in 2008 – Collins' first year in office but a year in which the county's budgeted funding of the library system was proposed by former County executive Joel Giambra. From 2009 through 2011, Collins tried to slash funding because he fails to understand the importance of our system. From 2004 to 2011, Erie County reduced library support by nearly 27%.

**Table I. County Funding for Buffalo and Erie County Public Library 2001 – 2011:**

	2001 Adopted	2002 Adopted	2003 Adopted	2004 Adopted	2005 Adopted	2006 Adopted	2007 Adopted	2008 Adopted	2009 Adopted	2010 Adopted	2011 Adopted
Erie County Capital for Library material	4,717,516	4,906,217	5,000,000	4,500,000	5,000,000*						
Interfund Revenue Subsidy								1,600,000		750,000**	
One Time Library Grant											3,000,000***
Library Property Tax	22,969,980	22,969,980	23,067,481	24,197,118	21,671,833	21,671,833	22,171,833	22,171,833	22,171,833	22,171,833	18,171,833
<b>Total County Support</b>	<b>27,687,496</b>	<b>27,876,197</b>	<b>28,067,481</b>	<b>28,697,118</b>	<b>21,671,833</b>	<b>21,671,833</b>	<b>22,171,833</b>	<b>23,771,833</b>	<b>22,171,833</b>	<b>22,171,833</b>	<b>21,171,833</b>

\*County funding for Library material included in Erie County's 2005 Adopted Budget was not provided to the Library.

Change in County Support From 2004 to 2011: (7,525,258)  
-26.22%

\*\* County funding for Interfund Revenue Subsidy included in Erie County's 2010 Adopted Budget was not provided to the Library.

\*\*\* One Time Library Grant was provided as part of the County's 2010 Fund Balance, but intended for use to offset funding cuts in the 2011 Budget.

The decision to reduce funding comes at a time when library visits across the country have increased, but hours have been slashed due to Chris Collins disregard for the importance of our libraries in terms of community and economic impact.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Erie County Taxpayers: Your Return on Investment in the Library. Buffalo & Erie County Library. <http://www.buffalolib.org>.

<sup>26</sup> "2011 Patron Door Counts." Buffalo and Erie County Public Library. <http://www.buffalolib.org/aboutthelibrary/statistics/2011/Patron%20Door%20Count%202001-2.pdf>.

In Wake County, North Carolina, a county of similar size to Erie, but with a much smaller library system, the County Budget has increased or held steady above \$16 Million, their library support each year since 2009. Wake County allocated \$16.1 Million in 2009 and increased that level to \$16.2 Million in 2010. In 2011, Wake County allocated \$17.6 Million for their libraries. The revenue generated in Wake County as a direct result of their libraries has been over \$1 Million each year since 2009.<sup>27</sup>

Chris Collins fails to recognize the impact libraries generate in terms of revenue and has tried to cut funding for our library system. If Collins looked at his own library system's numbers, he would see the return and savings on our investment. While counties like Wake in the South understand, and studies across the country are proving the return on investment in libraries, Chris Collins has created a crisis and is now trying to make the taxpayers of Erie County pay for it.

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<sup>27</sup> Wake County Budget and Finance. 2011 Fiscal Year Adopted Budget. Community Services, Division Summary – Libraries. [http://www.wakegov.com/NR/rdonlyres/F8746C7A-AE8D-4FBC-977C-71C32E3A4A31/O/wake\\_fy2011\\_adopted\\_budget.pdf](http://www.wakegov.com/NR/rdonlyres/F8746C7A-AE8D-4FBC-977C-71C32E3A4A31/O/wake_fy2011_adopted_budget.pdf).

## **The Purported Collins Plan**

In New York State, there are four types of public libraries; an Association Library, a Municipal Public Library, a School District Library and a Special District Public Library.<sup>28</sup>

In announcing his purported plan for the future of Erie County's library system, Chris Collins has proposed launching a special taxing district for the Erie County Library System.

As described by published reports, the plan proposed by Collins sets four priorities before a new special taxing district goes into effect (there does not appear to be a written plan produced at this time):

- (1) Collins will bolster county support by an additional \$2 million a year for three years by dipping into the county's rainy day fund. The Legislature would need to support this spending.
- (2) The county will take over the costs of maintenance and utilities of the Central Library, relieving the system of \$1.3 million in costs.
- (3) Cities, towns and villages will be asked to similarly maintain branches within their municipalities. That is estimated to save the system \$1.75 million a year.
- (4) The library system would cut spending on new materials by \$900,000 a year for three years, still leaving \$2.5 million for the purpose.<sup>29</sup>

Currently, the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library System is expansive and comprehensive. The Collins' plan is a massive undertaking and expense that will fall at the feet of Erie County's taxpayers. Many of Erie County's cities, towns and villages are already facing fiscal uncertainty. Forcing them to maintain their own branches is irresponsible, especially at the same time New York State passed a tax cap making it more difficult for municipalities to meet their community's needs. Collins created this problem and he should not be asking the county's local governments and our residents to bail him out.

Before creating a special taxing district to fund the libraries, the New York State Legislature must authorize such a plan. A State Legislator would be required to introduce a bill specifying the service area of the library and authorizing a public vote to create the library, elect trustees, and establish a budget. If the State legislation passed, an election would be scheduled within the municipality to select trustees and approve the initial library budget.

The municipality collects taxes on behalf of the library and turns the funds over to the library board, which is completely autonomous. If the new Special Legislative District Public Library is replacing an existing library, the library going out of business transfers assets to the new library and surrenders its charter to the Board of Regents. The process for creating a Special Legislative Public Library is more complex than the process for creating alternative models.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> New York State Library. <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/libs/pltypes.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> "Back the library plan." *Buffalo News*, 2011. <http://www.buffalonews.com/editorial-page/buffalo-news-editorials/article461584.ece>.

<sup>30</sup> New York State Libraries. <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov>.

In a similar situation, but on a smaller scale, Evanston, Illinois has proposed that their City create a taxing district for its library system. Assistant City Manager Marty Lyons expressed concerns saying the following, “Supporters of a separate district, after swearing it won’t cost more, will find that a separate district adds duplication of administrative costs.” Lyons based his claim that such a plan would cost more by citing his experience in other communities.

He went on to say, “The first cost is \$50,000 for an accounting system, then money to hire an accountant or bookkeeper. It’s not mismanagement, just that those things and more are needed to run a separate district well.”<sup>31</sup>

Lyons went on to lay out a possible formula: “If a budget for a branch was \$250,000 and properties in the proposed district had an assessed value of \$100 million, the city could set a tax rate of 0.25 percent to cover the budget. If there were 1,000 properties in the district, making the average assessed value \$100,000, then the cost per year for the average homeowner would be \$250.”<sup>32</sup>

One member of the Evanstown Budget Task Force said “that given the different levels of wealth in different parts of town, some neighborhoods might opt to pay for a branch library while others wouldn’t feel they could afford one.”<sup>33</sup>

This is the type of system discussed for Erie County right now, but unlike in Illinois, there is much more complexity to this matter when done in New York State and with a county the size of Erie.

In New York, when something like this is proposed, the measure must go through voter and state legislature approval. If approved, a special tax district would be created for voting on library budgets, their associated taxes, and trustees much like yearly school budget votes that take place in each district. Special Legislative Districts (at least thus far) are implemented on a per library basis, i.e. not a library system basis.<sup>34</sup>

This practice has gained popularity in more socially/politically isolated communities as a way of taxpayers themselves putting up good quality libraries without the blessing of some distant library-governing body. Erie County is not a socially or politically isolated county.

The Poloncarz Campaign can only assume, from looking at Chris Collins’ plan that either (1) all the libraries in the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library System would have to all consolidate as one single library – with multiple branches – and individual libraries would have to give up autonomy, like their board of trustees, in favor of centralized governance, or (2) each library within Erie County becomes its own Special Legislative District. Chris Collins has not answered these questions, nor has he expounded upon what his plan actually entails. Moreover, Chris did

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<sup>31</sup> Smith, Bill. *City eyes special tax districts for library branches*. Evanston Now, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

<sup>34</sup> New York State Libraries. <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov>.

not work with his partners in government in coming up with the plan. In fact, he did not even contact them beforehand to determine whether or not his plan was economically feasible.

Today in New York State, there are 47 libraries operating as Special Legislative District Libraries. Most of these are single-branched libraries, generally in more rural areas or Long Island. No Special Legislative Districts Exist in any form in Monroe or Albany counties. The notable multi-location exceptions include:

- Greater Poughkeepsie Library District (3 branches)
- Northern Onondaga Public Library (3 branches) – only Special Legislative District in Onondaga county
- Chemung County Library District (7 branches, incl. 3 in Elmira)
- Troy Public Library (3 branches)

Given that there is only one county in the entire state whose libraries are run under a Special Legislative District (Chemung, with a population of 88,830, has a single library with 7 branches), it is quite unprecedented for a county as large as Erie, as well as an entire library system, to become a Special Legislative District.<sup>35</sup>

According to the Buffalo News, the Collins' plan relies on the library system using the next few years to become fiscally stable before launching the taxing district.<sup>36</sup> The Poloncarz Campaign cannot ascertain at what point, before Chris Collins began slashing its budget, that the Erie County Library System became fiscally unstable. In fact, prior to the cuts proposed by Collins, there does not appear to be any evidence that the Erie County Library System was fiscally unstable. As evidenced in Table I, it was under Chris Collins' leadership, and only in the last two years, when the library system lost over 27% of its county support.

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<sup>35</sup> Id.

<sup>36</sup> "Back the library plan." *Buffalo News*, 2011. <http://www.buffalonews.com/editorial-page/buffalo-news-editorials/article461584.ece>.

## **The Mark Poloncarz Plan for Sustaining our Libraries in the Future**

Erie County residents understand the importance of libraries in terms of economic impact. County Executive Chris Collins originally ran on a promise of no tax hikes and no new taxes. Now, after raising taxes, he is going out of his way to create an entirely new tax to fix a problem he manufactured – a problem that did not exist but for his own draconian cuts. At a time when Erie County unemployment remains above 7% and the County Executive is hoarding federal money intended to create jobs now, there is no excuse for new taxes. Mark Poloncarz believes in Erie County's libraries – he is champion of our libraries. Mark Poloncarz will not support the Chris Collins' plan to create a new special taxing district with more administration, more costs, high salaries and new taxes – essentially another layer of government.

While Chris Collins continues to raise taxes, or create new tax levies, while cutting people's services, Mark Poloncarz has traveled across Erie County and railed against the fact that Erie County has over 750 special taxing districts or governments, which represent more than 10% of all districts across New York State. Poloncarz has been telling voters that Erie County does not have more than 10% of the state's population or tax base; and we should not have more than 10% of its governments. In December of 2008, Poloncarz joined current Governor and then-Attorney General Andrew Cuomo in Albany as both called for the reduction of special taxing districts in Erie County, and then in March of 2010, Poloncarz joined Cuomo in Buffalo to again call for the reduction of special taxing districts.

Mark Poloncarz, who does use our libraries and has a library card, like many of Erie County's blue-collar, hard-working taxpayers, believes it is absurd to create another government to operate our libraries at a time when Erie County has sufficient funding to maintain the system but the current county executive chooses not to do so. Chris Collins may ignore the benefits, economic and otherwise, that our libraries produce, but Mark Poloncarz stands with the people to oppose new taxes and defend our libraries from the assault waged by Collins.

Recessions or any type of economic downturn drive people to libraries to use essential services, especially the resources made available for a job search. People not only use libraries to access resources for employment, but they also use libraries for continuing education and to look up essential services. A library acts as a lifeline. When people cannot afford books, CDs and DVDs, they turn to their libraries. As described herein, libraries not only enrich the mind, but they are an economic investment in our future.

Libraries improve our quality of life and act as an essential educational resource. Mark believes that we should not be reducing the number of economic and educational resources, forcing people to choose between dwindling numbers of essential services. Mark knows that people expect their government to provide certain services and the residents of Erie County expect one of those services to be access to libraries with regular hours and an abundance of resources.

Mark Poloncarz will defend Erie County's library system and he will defend Erie County's residents from more tax burdens and more layers of government. As county executive, unlike the incumbent, Poloncarz will continue to fund the library system but he will demand that annual economic reviews of each library branch and the system are provided to the executive and legislature before any budget appropriations are approved. Additionally, every four (4) years Poloncarz will require an analysis be completed of the economic impact of each library branch and the system in total: a review that will examine cost savings to taxpayers and value

added indicia to the community as a whole. Poloncarz will commence such a review during his first year in office as executive.

Poloncarz will also work to expand tourism opportunities for our community by highlighting the unique and valuable community assets of the Library system, like its ownership of Mark Twain's the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* manuscript and a complete collection of John James Audubon's *The Birds of America*, as well as the valuable resources contained in the Mark Twain Room and the Grosvenor Rare Book Room. The contents of the Mark Twain and Rare Book rooms are priceless community assets that should never be put at risk because of a budgetary crisis caused by one person. Under a Poloncarz administration these contents will not only continue to be community assets, as Poloncarz will never put them at risk, but they will be the focus of a tourism campaign aimed at the myriad of individuals and groups that travel thousands of miles to see such assets. The New York Public Library and Cleveland Public Library draw thousands each year to visit their exhibits of rare books and artwork, and there is no reason that the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library cannot attempt to do the same with the priceless community assets it owns.

Poloncarz will also work to ensure that our libraries continue to be the centers for learning in every community of Erie County as they have in the past. While it is doubtful the system will ever grow to as many branches as it used to have, the citizens of Erie County deserve a system that retains the aspects that we have all come to expect: a place to learn for a lifetime. Andrew Carnegie understood that the key to success in life was to educate oneself and Mark Poloncarz understands the same. As such, he will demand that all library branches meet the basic criteria of being a place where people can learn from the age of 5 to 105, and that the latest technology be available to educate the people of our county.

This report should not be viewed as a final statement on Mark Poloncarz's plan for our libraries: it should be used as a template for further discussion, analysis and, ultimately, cooperation between community stakeholders towards creating a better library system. Our libraries create essential economic benefits and Mark Poloncarz, working with our partners in the community, intends to capitalize on them in order to grow our economy and support our residents.

**“In my opinion, the public library, as a civic center in a neighborhood, is second to none. The children go there to do their school work in the evening in preference to doing it at home. It is quieter there, and the librarian is always ready to help. Book talks are held every afternoon for the boys and girls of the public schools; that is the only way they would ever get to know about books, as their homes are too poor to own them....”<sup>37</sup>**

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<sup>37</sup> Thornton, Anne. *Patience and Fortitude: The New York Public Library During the Great Depression and Today's Economic Crisis*. New York Public Library, 2009.  
<http://www.nypl.org/blog/2009/03/03/patience-and-fortitude-new-york-public-library-during-great-depression-and-today%E2%80%99s-e>.

