Appropriations Committee
Connecticut State Legislature

March 3, 2015

Dear Committee Members,

I will be speaking tonight in response to Governor's Bill No. 942. My comments will summarize the longer written testimony I have provided for you here.

The cover story of the March 2015 issue of The Rotarian is entitled "In Praise of Libraries." As a rotarian and a librarian, this endorsement from such a prominent international civic organization thrilled me.

The author, Joe Queenan, states:

**"The Public Library is the only civic institution in my community that is uncompromisingly successful."**

He goes on to add however:

**"The public library is an indispensable institution that somehow manages to get taken completely for granted."**

While I recognize you, our state leaders, have a difficult task in trying to ameliorate the budget deficit, Governor's Bill No. 942 does exactly what Mr. Queenan purports. It takes indispensible and cost-saving library programs for granted and eliminates the most successful examples of regionalism in the State.

The Connecticard Program, State Grants to Public Libraries, and funding to the Connecticut Library Consortium and CT Humanities provide minimum subsidies that allow libraries to maximize their budgets and reduce costs to their local governments. The fact that this bill not only recommends cutting funding to these programs, but eliminates the statutes that require their existence, is unconscionable. Further, it would reduce Connecticut's direct state aid to public libraries to just $0.08 cents per capita and drop our ranking in this area to 42nd in the nation.

How can you consider cutting programs whose return on investment far exceeds their cost? The Connecticut Library Consortium, who stands to lose over half of its budget with these cuts, negotiates group purchasing deals that save Connecticut libraries millions of dollars each year. My library saved $1,000 last year on the purchase of a database that will allow me to share over 25,000 electronic resources between my institution, my local historical society and my schools. In addition, the Connecticut Library Consortium

provides the mechanism through which Connecticut librarians can receive professional development at little or no cost. I was able to start a New Library Director's Roundtable that is free for participants to attend and has covered leadership topics while providing a forum for new directors to discuss the issues they are facing.

Last week I was reminded that the programs libraries provide can mean much more than we know to our residents. A gentleman approached me and mentioned he heard there was a wonderful concert at my library last month. He went on to tell me that he is looking forward to the next one as he lost his wife a year ago and attending concerts will be his way of coming out of his grief.

While the concerts and lectures we offer are always free for attendees, the cost to provide them can range from $100-$500. Last year my library received a $500 grant from the Connecticut Humanities that allowed us to offer a lecture series on the 70th Anniversary of D-Day. In 15 years as a librarian, it has been my experience that programming budgets suffer when times are tough. The availability of outside grants to support these life-enhancing services is crucial.

I am also concerned about the elimination of the Connecticard Program. For 40 years Connecticut has been a leader in its ability to share resources between libraries. The Connecticard Program allows Connecticut residents to borrow materials from a library in another town without having to pay a fee and provides a reimbursement to each library. In return for just under one million dollars, there were 4.5 million items loaned to non-residents or a value of over $68 million dollars in library materials. States like Vermont are just now trying to build the infrastructure needed to create a reciprocal library borrowing program.

The Connecticard Program also helps libraries save money because they don't have to buy everything a resident may need. For libraries who have financial or space constraints, this program means their residents have the same access to materials as someone who lives in a town with a more robust library collection. Equal access to information is the North Star of library service because it is the cornerstone of an informed and educated citizenry regardless of socio-economic status.

Queenan points to this in his article when he says:

**"The wide array of things that libraries offer means that they reach all levels of society. They make society better than it would be if left to its own devices. Libraries are a subtle, almost cunning bulwark against the racial and socioeconomic segregation that society naturally gravitates toward, even when it does not do so out of malice."**

So as you consider the tough decisions you must make during the budget process, please don't take libraries for granted. These programs work, they save money and their value is much greater than their cost. They represent regionalism at its best and are uncompromisingly successful.

At the end of each Rotary Club meeting we recite the Four Way Test which includes the line "Of the things we think, say or do is it beneficial for all concerned?" Not only is Governor's Bill No. 942 not beneficial for all concerned, it will set Connecticut Libraries back 40 years and it is the wrong thing to do.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Beth Crowley

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Vice-President/President-Elect of the Connecticut Library Association
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