To the Honorable State Representatives and Senators of the Appropriations Subcommittee for Elementary and Secondary Education:

My name is Tom Piezzo, and I am the director of the Brainerd Memorial Library in Haddam. I am a committee chair for the Connecticut Library Association, a board member of the LION libraries consortium, and the chair of a Connecticut Library Consortium round table. I thank you for considering my testimony in support of Governor’s Bill 7148, and for restored funding for the Connecticut State Library and the Connecticut Library Consortium. I will briefly share the impact that a decade of cuts to the State Library (CSL) has had on my patrons.

In just the past three years our library, like most, absorbed costs passed on to us for services formerly provided free, as well as the loss of grants-in-aid. My users relied on the inter-loan delivery service provided by the CSL to expand the breadth of available materials, as has been the case in Connecticut for 40 years. My materials budget is predicated on this shared access, but cuts to DeliverIT, the delivery service, resulted in an additional $1,500 annual delivery cost to supplement this vital component. Reductions in operations and staff at the State Library Service Centers (recently reduced statewide from two to one location) led to the discontinuation of the shared audio book co-op. Those lost savings total over $1,000 annually. Like all libraries, we have lost the $1,200 annual grant-in-aid from the State Library. I could not even entertain replacing lost databases accessed through the CSL. Not calculable in dollars is the threatened diminishment of opportunity for free or reduced-cost professional development through the both the state library and the Connecticut Library Consortium. All the additional costs have come out of materials, programming, and supplies, incrementally compromising the quality of our operation.

With our town’s own financial challenges, the library budget has been flat for four years, so it is easy to see how even these few examples, compounded by the ground lost each year not keeping pace with inevitable cost escalations, reduce our capacity.

Another way libraries make the most of State funds is through the Connecticut Library Consortium (CLC), whose negotiating power leverages the economy of scale on
over 40 contracts afforded by its 800 members of public, school and college libraries. CLC provides professional development to supplement the CSL’s offerings, administers round tables, offers discounts on supplies, databases, materials. Innovative products such the deeply discounted mobile WiFi hotspot for patrons to borrow – a means of passing savings on to the public, in some cases bridging the still-real digital divide – would be unaffordable for my small library if not for these brokered discounts. CLC is moving toward funding more of its operation independent of State money, and is only asking that its State funding be restored to a modest 30% of its budget while it makes this transition.

Libraries are nearly the only community institutions which serve all ages, incomes, backgrounds and interests equally, openly, and without fee for service. The very financial challenges the State faces are the reason why what we offer every day is so crucial. And, while appropriation committee decisions may sound abstract and far-away to my staff and library users, I can report on the disproportionately positive difference made by such a small fraction of the overall State budget: the amount invested in supporting libraries.

Sincerely,

Thomas Piezzo