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J. GARY PRETLOW
Assemblyman 89th District

January 29, 2018

Greetings to the Board of the Westchester Library System:

This letter is intended to address the recent decision made by the Westchester Library System (WLS) Board of Trustees that appears to ignore the extensive study by a WLS subcommittee and associated community conversation surrounding the continued role of the Central Library. As you know I have historically and enthusiastically supported New York State libraries, the Westchester Library System and its member libraries. I have consistently voted to extend significant capital improvement funds benefiting member libraries and promoted New York State Library literacy and other important initiatives.

It is from this perspective that I am both concerned and disappointed to learn of the WLS decision to divert all \$351,266 of New York State Central Library Development (CLD) funding entirely to WLS, without any funds allocated for print material, staffing, programming or potential development of the Central Library infrastructure. During the hearing process on removing Central Library status from Mount Vernon, you, the board, stated that this was only a name designation and all funding will remain in place. Subsequently, CLS status remained with Mount Vernon but it appears your true intentions were to remove funding from the Mount Vernon Public Library. This is intolerable.

In past years, the Westchester Central Library had been allocated control of less than 10 % of the state funds to advance its legislative purpose to serve both the public and its member libraries. Funds are now being utilized in part to purchase subscription of electronic fiction materials. As I understand, the NY State regulation of distribution of digital fiction material is not intended to be included within the Central Library budget expenditures.

The decision limits access to only those individuals and families with access to "smart devices". Until WLS can persuasively justify this horrendous level of disenfranchisement that furthers the widening gap between the Westchester County "haves" and the "have nots", this budget decision must be rescinded and reconsidered.

I am a long standing, influential member of the State Assembly and I consider this issue to be significant in its clear disparate impact. The historical support for WLS and the Central Library I have demonstrated on behalf of my constituents should not be rewarded by this lack of consideration and regard to those unable to access digital technology. CLD funds are to

maintain and improve the Central Library's function. The Central Library role as a major reference and information resource cannot be fulfilled by just access to electronic portals.

The two year budget proposed by WLS ignores the present and future need of County residents to access print materials. In addition, I personally oppose WLS control of the entire Central Library budget where credit for the use of these resources goes only to WLS and not the Central Library whose funds are used to acquire same. If left to stand, this situation must be brought to the attention of my colleague DiDi Barrett, Chairperson on the State Assembly Committee on Libraries and Education Technology.

I look forward to hearing that WLS has taken the more prudent course of reconsidering the budget allocation and to include the Central Library and other community stakeholders in the conversation.

Sincerely,

J. Gary Pretlow
Member of NYS Assembly
89th District