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Assemblyman Sweeney Joins Long Island Adult Literacy Advocates

Tells advocates to continue the fight against proposed budget cuts

Farmingdale, N.Y. – Speaking to a large crowd of adult students, volunteer tutors, administrators and other supporters from Literacy Suffolk, Inc. and Literacy Nassau, Assemblyman Robert Sweeney vowed to fight on behalf of New York State’s Adult Literacy Education (ALE) program.

Dozens traveled from all ends of Long Island to meet at Farmingdale Public Library to advocate on behalf of the statewide and local literacy programs that have helped thousands of Long Island adults learn to read, write, speak English and acquire the basic skills essential to advance in today’s workforce.

“There is still an opportunity to restore funding,” said Assemblyman Sweeney to the crowd. “Call your local legislators, tell them how important this program is, and tell them they must restore funding. If we all do this, I’m confident that restorations can be made.”

Literacy Suffolk and Literacy Nassau are two of 37 local programs that stand to lose nearly 40 percent of their state funding under budget cuts proposed in Albany. Budget proposals under consideration in Albany would cut more than \$2 million of all state funding to literacy assistance programs across New York. This cut is in addition to a \$612,000 cut in the 2009-10 Deficit Reduction Plan (DRP). With last year’s DRP reduction of funding, literacy programs throughout the state are now looking at a nearly 40 percent cut over last year’s funding.

Gini Booth, executive director of Literacy Suffolk, moderated the event. “With 22 percent of New Yorkers below the basic literacy level, these cuts in funding would be disastrous. We tutor hundreds of students every year, removing the barriers to literacy and learning. Our one-on-one tutors are volunteers, but with a nearly \$97,000 cut in just one year, we will no longer be able to recruit, train, support and match the most appropriate tutor to each of our adult students.”

“I retired back in 1997 and could barely read,” said Johnny Gilchrist, a student and board member at Literacy Nassau. “With this program, I learned to read much better. I can read the computer, read emails and read to my grandchildren. It’s really important to have these programs.”

“This is such an important program that provides the educational services our community needs,” said Karen Johnson, executive director of Literacy Nassau. “Adult literacy education can, and has, opened the door for so many adults. The program helps to change not just individuals, but entire families; it has a huge affect on the children as well as the adult parent or grandparent. The nearly 40 percent cut to Literacy Nassau would mean a loss of \$83,000 for the 2010-11 funding cycle. The legislature must restore funding.”

The nearly 40-percent cut from this year’s proposed state budget would mean a loss of \$83,000 for Literacy Nassau.

“We must restore the Adult Literacy Education funding now,” said Dr. Aldustus E. Jordan, III, board president of Literacy Suffolk, Inc. “A literate population is essential to the strength of our nation’s

future. In Suffolk County, one in seven Suffolk County residents are functionally illiterate, 75 percent of unemployed adults are nonreaders and almost 45 percent of adults below the poverty level do not possess the basic writing skills they need to improve their lives and the lives of their families. The ability to read, write and communicate effectively is critical to personal freedom and maintenance of a democratic society.” Dr. Aldustus Jordan concluded his message the same way he began: “We must restore the Adult Literacy Education funding now.”

“Our programs are already doing all they can with what they have,” said Maureen O’Connor, chief operating officer of Queens Borough Public Library and board vice-chair of Literacy New York. “For every dollar of public support, we get \$4 from the local community. These cuts are penny-wise and pound-foolish. The cuts will directly affect our capacity to continue to provide the educational services our adults and our community needs.”



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Since 1977, Literacy New York (LNY) has been a leading advocate for adult literacy in New York State and nationally. Literacy New York provides technical, program, and training assistance and workshops to a network of 37 local, community-based affiliates who annually provide over 400,000 hours of reading and basic skills instruction to adult learners.

As a learner-centered literacy service since 1968, Literacy Nassau provides services each year for hundreds of Nassau adults who are functionally illiterate, assisting them, their families – and hopefully future generations – toward self-sufficiency and personal success. Since its inception Literacy Nassau has had a single and unwavering mission: to promote and foster literacy in Nassau County among adult learners in need of improved skills in Basic Literacy and English for Speakers of Other Languages. Through trained volunteer tutors in one-to-one and small group learning experiences students are matched with tutors to achieve the educational, economic and social goals they and their tutors have identified as important to them.

Literacy Suffolk, Inc. is dedicated to providing a variety of literacy services to adults, thereby enabling them to achieve their personal goals. Literacy Suffolk recruits volunteers and trains them to tutor fellow adults in basic language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Part of the Literacy Suffolk Initiatives include: Health Literacy, Law Literacy and Removing the Barriers to Literacy and Learning: Shame. Since its inception in 1978, Literacy Suffolk has helped thousands of adults to acquire the skills necessary to realize their potential and become fully participating members of society.