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Regional Advocates of Adult Literacy Join Together to Denounce Proposed Cuts

Rochester, N.Y. – Dozens gathered today to support the literacy program that has helped thousands of adults in Rochester, Ontario, Yates, Steuben and other counties across New York learn to read, write, speak English and provide the basic skills essential to advance in today's workforce.

Current state budget proposals would cut more than \$2 million – or about one-third of all state funding – to literacy assistance programs across New York. This cut is in addition to a \$612,000 cut under the 2009-10 Deficit Reduction Plan (DRP). With last year's DRP reduction of funding, literacy programs throughout the state are now faced with a nearly 40 percent potential cut from last year's funding level.

Bob Mahar, executive director of Literacy Volunteers of Rochester, moderated the event. "With 22 percent of New Yorkers below the basic literacy level, these cuts in funding would be disastrous. We work with nearly 500 students each year and have over 300 volunteer tutors, yet we still have a waiting list of more than a 100 students. With this 40 percent cut, we are losing \$35,000 in just one year. That means a minimum of 60 more students that will not get the educational support they need to read, write and succeed in the workforce."

"This is such an important program that provides the educational services our community needs," said Linda Proctor, director of Literacy Volunteers of Ontario-Yates. "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 their parents and grandparents. The legislature must restore this funding."

"Twenty-two percent of New Yorkers are below basic literacy level, yet our one-on-one volunteer program helps thousands of New Yorkers every year," said Kevin Smith, executive director of Literacy New York. "This program is a necessity for so many. Not only does it afford the support and educational services adult students need, it provides the knowledge and opportunity so that they can help their children and grandchildren succeed in the future."

"Literacy has a huge impact on an individual and our community," said Chris Edgar, executive director of Literacy Volunteers of Wayne County. "It opens the door to vital information, increases self-esteem, independence and productivity. In turn, these skills enable students to become more active and effective community members."

Ed Langman, a student at Literacy Volunteers of Wayne County, agrees. "I left school when I was in the third grade, but with this program I can now read and I help others. Please don't cut this funding."

"I'm 70 years old, and for the first time in my life, I can read," said Frank, a student at Literacy Volunteers of Buffalo and Erie County. "I can read street signs, newspapers and even novels. Now, not only do my children and grandchildren have an education, but I do too."

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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.

Literacy Volunteers of Rochester, Inc. is an organization of trained volunteers dedicated to providing one-to-one or small group tutoring to functionally illiterate adults and to others lacking English language skills, and to fostering literacy in the greater Rochester NY area. Our services are provided free of charge. We generally accept into the program students who read below an eighth grade reading level. Among speakers of other languages, emphasis is placed on the newcomer whose need for English is urgent and whose level is low.

*Since 1967, the forerunner of **Literacy Volunteers Ontario - Yates**, the Literacy Volunteers of Ontario County, Inc. (New York) offered free and confidential one-to-one tutoring help to adults who want to improve their reading, writing, and English-speaking skills. On February 18, 2009, Literacy Volunteers of Ontario County expanded its program to also include Literacy Volunteers of Yates County (New York). The combined name is Literacy Volunteers Ontario - Yates (LVOY).*