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Buffalo and Erie County Advocates Unite Against Adult Literacy Budget Cuts

Buffalo, N.Y. – Students, volunteer tutors, administrators and local elected officials from adult literacy programs throughout the Western New York joined together at the Central Library in Downtown Buffalo to call on the state Legislature to restore funding to New York’s Adult Literacy Education (ALE) program.

“The Adult Literacy Education (ALE) program cannot sustain this type of cut,” said Chris Gibas, executive director of Literacy Volunteers of Buffalo and Erie County. “This is such an important program that provides the educational services our community needs. 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 parents or grandparents.”

The 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.

Literacy Volunteers of Buffalo and Erie County, and Literacy Volunteers of Niagara County, two of the 37 affiliates of Literacy New York (LNY), co-hosted today’s news conference. “I’m thrilled to be part of this partnership,” said Bridget Quinn-Carey, director of the Erie County Public Library System, which recently relocated to the Central Library in downtown Buffalo. “Libraries are a place with no stigma – a safe place to help and educate the people of our community and our state. We all understand funding is tight, but we truly need the funding in order to keep our literacy program running.”

Amy Lawrence, program director for Literacy Volunteers of Buffalo and Erie County, said, “We help hundreds of students every year learn how to read, write and speak English. Our services are very important for them; reading is everywhere, from street signs to job applications to their children’s homework. They have learned so much from this program. I don’t know what they would do if they didn’t have this education.”

Kevin Smith, executive director of Literacy New York, added, “Twenty-two percent of New Yorkers are below basic literacy level, and every year thousands of New Yorkers volunteer their time to help others learn how to read and become less dependent. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the value of their contributed volunteer time would have been approximately \$6.5 million. We understand these are tough times; we are not asking for what our program is worth, only enough so our doors don’t have to close.”

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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 Buffalo & Erie County is a nonprofit educational program dedicated to helping adults and families of all ages improve their lives and their communities by learning reading, writing, math and problem-solving skills. Literacy Volunteers is the region’s sole provider of free, one-on-one adult and family literacy services and offers several programs: Basic Reading, English For Speakers of Other Languages, the Drop In Literacy & Language Program, the Broadway Fillmore Community Technology Collaborative youth after school project, SES (Supplemental After School Services) Tutoring, and Peer Tutoring. We have recently expanded our service delivery to include several neighborhoods based Literacy & Language Drop In Centers in the City of Buffalo’s most impoverished neighborhoods.