



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY,  
NY 12234

**TO:** Cultural Education Committee

**FROM:** Jeffrey Cannell

**SUBJECT:** Public Library Construction

**DATE:** December 9, 2013

**AUTHORIZATION(S):**

SUMMARY

**Issue for Discussion**

Overview and background on State Aid for library construction

**Reason(s) for Consideration**

For Information. Education Law 273-a establishes the public library construction grant program. Recently amended by Chapter 498 of the Laws of 2011, the law now includes sunset language which will automatically repeal the new provisions that took effect in 2012 as of March 31, 2015. The Board will be asked at a future meeting to approve a proposal to make permanent the 2011 amendments.

**Background Information**

The Board of Regents advocated for the \$14 million appropriation for a construction grant program in the 2006 - 2007 State budget. The Executive and Legislature have since provided \$14 million annually in capital funds to support public library construction grants. The program is highly visible and has been very successful. In the past seven years, the program has awarded \$98 million that supported a total of 1,267 construction grant projects for 602 unique public library and library system facilities. In October 2013, libraries and systems submitted a total of 187 applications for the 2013-2016 grant cycle. These grants will be awarded in Spring 2014. The changes made to Education Law 273-a in 2011 include the ability to use State funds to acquire vacant land and that approved projects serving economically disadvantaged communities may be funded up to seventy-five percent of eligible project costs. Prior to 2011, all projects were funded up to fifty percent. The new provisions took effect in 2012 and will be automatically repealed in 2015 if action is not taken in the 2014 session.

The Board of Regents has endorsed the concept that all public libraries should be able to accommodate new technologies and provide the knowledge resources New Yorkers need to be successful in an information-driven global environment. Despite the many successes of the current public library construction grant program, there is still a pressing need for State support. The estimated need for new construction, expansion and renovation of existing public library facilities to ensure that New York's libraries are accessible to all library users and can accommodate advances in technology is over \$2.2 billion. Over 48% of the over 1,000 public library buildings in New York are now over 60 years old. An additional 33% are more than three decades old. Many of these libraries lack facilities to serve their communities adequately. Over 24% do not have all public areas accessible to wheelchairs. Many public libraries need to upgrade electrical and wiring for public access computers and broadband infrastructure and do not have sufficient space to house the library's collection.