Stand in support of New York's libraries

George T. Wolf & Donna P. Benjamin
Guest Essayists

As regular public library patrons, we publicly declare our support for the Monroe County Library System and Rochester Public Library, as well as for all the libraries in New York state. Our libraries, like so many others, are cornerstones of our communities.

Libraries are for everyone; they provide a safe and welcoming space for all New Yorkers, regardless of race or ethnicity, religion, country of origin, income, or education level. Federal policies are undermining New York's already inequitable tax structure, and the result leaves funding for education services under attack.

To paraphrase Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "a budget is a moral document." Where we, through our elected officials, choose to spend our collective resources serves as a testament to what we value. As our elected representatives come together to craft this year's NYS budget, we want a document that speaks to our hopes rather than our fears and creates policies that will benefit every New Yorker — and there is no better declaration of intent than funding our community libraries.

Libraries offer free and equal access to educational opportunities, and are the primary source of Internet access for many of our neighbors. New Yorkers of all ages, experiences, and needs turn to their local library for early literacy programs; classes in adult education and financial literacy; health groups and fitness workshops; technology assistance; English and other language classes; and many other programs and services.

New York state has failed to fully fund library services for more than a decade. This underfunding has withheld more than $110 million in aid. This has undermined local education opportunities, and pushed costs onto local taxpayers. When NYS fails to fund library services, we have diminished services that cost more. It's not only inefficient, it's unconscionable.

George T. Wolf is president of the Monroe County Library System. Donna P. Benjamin is president of the Rochester Public Library.