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Capital District Adult Literacy Students Denounce State Budget Cuts

Albany, N.Y. –Students, volunteer tutors and administrators from adult literacy programs throughout the Capital District joined together at the State Capitol earlier today calling on the state Legislature to restore funding to New York’s Adult Literacy Education (ALE) program.

On behalf of nine counties from across the Capital District, the crowd represented four of the 37 affiliates of Literacy New York (LNY). The groups included Literacy Volunteers of Fulton County, Literacy Volunteers of Rensselaer County and Literacy Volunteers of Schoharie and Montgomery Counties. Also participating was Literacy New York – Greater Capital Region. This group represents Albany, Schenectady, Saratoga, Warren and Washington counties.

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. The funding loss translates to hundreds of adults students no longer able to receive educational services.

“Twenty-two percent of New Yorkers are below basic literacy level and this program provides the help and support these students need to not only communicate, but succeed in today’s workforce.” said Kevin Smith, executive director of Literacy New York. “The Adult Literacy Education (ALE) program cannot sustain this type of cut,”

“These cuts to adult literacy will weaken students’ ability to excel in his or her education or advance in a career,” said JoAnn LeSage Nelson, president of the LNY-GCR Board of Directors. “Every year there are thousands of New Yorkers who fight for the chance to learn how to read and to write and even communicate with their neighbors. Simply put, the proposed cuts will result in fewer New Yorkers receiving basic literacy education.”

“This program is so important. It has enabled me to read and to write,” said Aileen, a student at Literacy Volunteers Rensselaer County. “It’s very shameful to know you can’t read or write, but now I can read to my grandchildren, and they even give me a ‘thumbs up’. You can’t cut this program, people need it so bad. Please don’t cut our budget for Literacy Volunteers.”

“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 time contributed by volunteers is worth approximately \$6.5 million” said Smith. “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.