



NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LIBRARIES AND EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY

HEARING ON FUNDING PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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Good morning. I am George Mihaltses, Vice President for Government and Community Affairs at The New York Public Library (NYPL). I am joined by Christopher Platt, Vice President for Library Services. I would like to thank Chair Thomas Abinanti and all of the members of the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Libraries and Education Technology for inviting us to testify today. We are honored that you have chosen to hold this hearing in NYPL's iconic, flagship location and I appreciate the opportunity to testify today about our system and the impact that the 2015-16 State Budget has had on our programs and services.

Founded in 1895, NYPL is our country's largest public library system. We operate through 88 neighborhood branches across three boroughs: The Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island. Accompanying our branch libraries are our four research facilities: The Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem, the Science, Industry, and Business Library, and the Library for the Performing Arts (LPA) at Lincoln Center. In Fiscal Year 2015 our system recorded nearly 18 million in-person visits with an additional 30 million visits online. In that same time NYPL's circulation reached over 23 million while we had upwards of 1.5 million attendees for our library programming. Currently, we have over 2 million library cardholders, research collections of over 45 million, and 6.6 million circulating items.



As you know, never before has the services of our libraries been more in need. In New York City alone, nearly 25% of families with children under 18 years old are living below the poverty line. 27% of all homes lack internet access and 17% of New York City homes do not have a computer. Nearly half of our residents speak a language other than English, and, of those people, 47% of them do not speak English well. And, across New York State, 20% of K-12 youth are responsible for taking care of themselves after school. At NYPL we are working hard to provide programs and services to meet these needs.

Over the last year, NYPL provided 10,000 seats to New Yorkers in our English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. In addition to formal language instruction, we established “New Americans Corners” in all 88 of our neighborhood libraries that will provide information to help new immigrants, including citizenship courses. We have also partnered with the City to provide courses in multiple languages for small business owners and entrepreneurs.

Through a formal series of after-school programs we are providing structured, educational activities that complement the DOE’s curriculum. This past year we were able to offer 3,000 seats across 25 locations. This is nearly double our reach from the previous year. We know, however, that there is still more demand to be met and with increased investment we are prepared to expand to nearly 10,000 students. We are also committed to early childhood education and, since 2012, attendance at these programs has increased more than 30%.



Over the past year we have also continued to expand our technology programs and services, doubling the number of attendees to our TechConnect courses. We are also partners in the Library HotSpot initiative - a joint program with the Brooklyn and Queens Public Libraries, the City of New York, the Federal government, and private partners such as Google and the Knight Foundation. TechConnect seeks to lend 10,000 Wi-Fi hotspot devices to New York City families who lack broadband internet at home. Through this program and our other service offerings we hope to help bring these families out of the digital dark.

Throughout our over 100 year history, the essential facilities, materials, and services NYPL has brought to the people of New York have been supported by our partners in government. So today, I would like to say "thank you." Thank you for investing in our State's libraries. We are grateful that, for the past four years, we have seen steady increases in State funding that have made progress toward fully restoring our State-funded budget to its pre-recession level. This year's budget increase of \$5 million to \$91.6 million will allow libraries to better serve New Yorkers by expanding hours, increasing programs, acquiring more materials, and hiring more staff.

As for NYPL specifically, our share of the Library Aid funding totaled \$19.329 million. These funds support Basic State Aid, which is formula-based aid funding used to support salaries,



collections, and services for our circulating libraries, as well as Designated State Aid, which supports many of our research functions. Specifically:

- The Schomburg Center, which is the nation's preeminent archive documenting the global experience of peoples of African descent. The world-renowned Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture strongly depends on funding from the State to support its programs and services.
- The Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library (Heiskell), which provides support services to blind and visually-impaired readers in the NYC metropolitan area. Heiskell expanded its service area to all of Long Island in 2012 and circulates over 514,000 items annually and provides barrier-free accessible service to 82,000 people on-site while also responding to more than 31,000 telephone calls. Funding from the State is critical to their mandate.
- Our Science, industry and Business Library, which provides resources for small business owners, one-on-one career counseling, and financial literacy programs. The services provided by SIBL are critical at a time when access to business and job related resources is in more demand than ever before.
- Finally, The New York Public Library provides vital resources to CUNY students through funding which supports collections particularly targeted to CUNY students. This partnership ensures that our City's postsecondary learners have access to our great research collections.

Additionally, the Library receives capital support through the NYS Public Library Construction Grant Program. These funds, approximately \$1.7 million each year, go towards supporting critical maintenance projects throughout our system. Most recently funds have supported a large-scale renovation of our Schomburg Center, Washington Heights Branch in Upper Manhattan and Woodstock Branch in the Bronx. For Washington Heights and Woodstock, these historic Carnegie branches required top-to-bottom renovations, including ADA access and exterior work. The library is also moving forward on its Midtown plan. The Midtown project will completely renovate and update the Mid-Manhattan Library while creating increased public space at the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building for researchers and exhibitions. The plan will



create a modern library experience in the heart of midtown Manhattan for NYPL's research, circulating, and business library functions.

Library infrastructure continues to age and many branches need to be reconfigured for how New Yorkers use libraries today, with increased programming space upgraded technology and ADA access. Capital funding for libraries is critically important to meet these needs. We would strongly support any proposed increase to the Library Construction Grant Program.

Despite the budget cuts from 2008 to 2012, NYPL has worked hard to maintain 6-day service in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island. The additional funding in this year's State budget, combined with a significant increase in City funding, will allow us to increase hours across our 88 branches from an average of 46 to 50 hours per week. To achieve these increased hours, we are hiring 93 new librarians (45 children's librarians, 22 young adult librarians, and 26 adult librarians) in branches across Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island in addition to critical support roles: thirteen facilities personnel and two security staff. On the research side the story is similar. This year, the Schomburg Center and SIBL will increase hours and we have also been able to create seven full time jobs and a page position at our four research libraries.

Importantly, these new hires not only allow us to expand hours, but to accelerate the growth of our essential programs and services. In our neighborhood libraries, we are using this moment to magnify our investment in the youngest New Yorkers. Specifically, we are focusing our



efforts on early literacy. Currently, we provide story time and other high quality early literacy programming at 80 sites across the system. Of those locations, 20 have been specifically designated as early literacy sites and host intensive resources and supervision for young readers. Furthermore, we have partnered with NYC Pre-K for All classes to provide thousands of children with high-quality supplemental literacy services. In our research locations we are working hard to make it easier to get our materials into the hands of our users – if you are a researcher who uses the Schomburg but need materials housed at SIBL, we can make that happen. We are also highlighting the work of these researchers, whether it is a play, a new business or a published newspaper article, through exhibitions and talks.

I think we all agree that New Yorkers need, and deserve strong libraries. As significant as the expansion of our 2015-2016 budget is, it still falls short of our pre-recession peak. It is with our patrons, your constituents, in mind that we realize the potential good we can accomplish in the coming years. A return to our 2008 funding level will allow NYPL to expand our capacity to serve New Yorkers.

Once again, I believe it is clear that your re-investment in our libraries has and will provide a strong and impactful return for the people of this City. As we move forward, we are excited to work with you to continue to provide our patrons with the library spaces and services they need and deserve.



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Once again, thank you for all your support and for this opportunity to testify. We remain available to answer any questions you may have.