



**New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Libraries
and Education Technology**

January 10, 2018

Good morning. My name is Nick Buron, Chief Librarian and Senior Vice President at Queens Library. On behalf of our President and CEO, Dennis Walcott, thank you, Madame Chair, all your colleagues in the State Legislature, and Governor Cuomo for providing \$95.6 million in State Library Operating Aid this past fiscal year, as well as for the \$5 million increase in State Construction Aid for a total of \$24 million. Thank you for holding today's important hearing to allow us to talk about the many programs and services Queens Library provides for the people of Queens County and New York City, and to discuss the impact of State Operating and Construction aid on the Library.

Every day, Queens Library provides the broadest range of services to New Yorkers from all walks of life. Whether it is a family trying to give their young child a foundation for educational success, an older adult keeping his or her mind sharp by engaging in art or computer workshops, or every age group in between, you can find a free program at our libraries.

Queens Library is a national leader in the delivery of varied and innovative services to our youngest library patrons. We are the first public library in the country to collaborate with a municipal education department to provide a library-based, accredited, universal pre-kindergarten program. We offer Universal Pre-K instruction at our Woodhaven Community Library and Ravenswood Family Literacy Center. This year we began free afterschool, wraparound programming from 2:20PM to 6:00PM at our Ravenswood UPK to support families who need longer hours. Queens Library also offers a unique Kickoff to Kindergarten (K2K) program, an eight-week school readiness program for children ages three to five and their caregivers. K2K was originally developed and piloted by Queens Library professionals at eight community libraries. This successful program has expanded to 12 community libraries, serving approximately 675 families since its inception.

In Fiscal Year 2017, more than 570,000 young people attended Queens Library programming for children and teens. Recognizing our potential and the importance of reaching this age group, Queens Library developed a free, evidence-based, afterschool program called STACKS, which is designed to enhance students' learning experiences through structured and unstructured age-appropriate activities that build emotional, social, and academic skills.

We are currently offering this program at 18 of our community libraries, serving over 700 children, and the response has been tremendous. Due to the program's popularity, we have waiting lists at nearly every location as many parents are struggling to find quality afterschool programs in a safe environment for their children. We have plans to expand the program to every library in our system but need additional funding.

Queens Library operates one of the largest library-run literacy programs in the United States. Our Young Adult Literacy Program (YALP) provides resources to young adults in various capacities. We provide our young adult literacy participants with a wide array of instructional, vocational, recreational, family support, and social services. Instructional services include:

- Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Pre-HSE (High School Equivalency)
- Job Readiness/Resume Preparation Workshops
- Small Literacy / English Learning Groups
- Computer-Assisted Instruction
- Monthly Cultural Workshops & Center Outings
- Independent Learning Materials
- An Extensive Book and Multimedia Collections

In Fiscal Year 2017, we provided 117 individuals, ages 16 to 24, with academic preparation toward a high school diploma, intensive case management, internships, and job shadowing. Of the 117 students, 111 who completed the program experienced a 69% education gain.

Our Adult Learner Program (ALP) provides services, resources, and lifelong learning opportunities to the changing communities of Queens. In addition to our core initiatives, ALP offers Adult Learning Resources for students and educators, including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Learn to Read programs and activities for beginning to mid-level adult readers, and Pre-HSE classes for adults who speak English and want to improve their reading and math skills in preparation for HSE classes. We operate seven Adult Learning Centers, with full-time professional staff and volunteers who tutor literacy groups and facilitate ESOL conversation groups. Centers also offer Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes, video groups, writing groups, technology-assisted instruction, and ongoing tutor training provided by professional staff. In Fiscal Year 2017, we served 5,500 adult learners, and students participated in our structured 12-week ESOL program. Our Adult Learner Program is widely popular and in high demand. We provide ALP services at 38 community libraries, but we are still struggling to meet demand. For example, we were forced to turn away over 1,000 individuals from our ESOL program because we did not have a seat for them. We need additional funding to accommodate everyone seeking these services.

For our older adults, Queens Library offers a wealth of free programs and resources that include:

- Book-discussion groups
- Live performances and readings
- Talks and panel discussions
- Film screenings
- Drama clubs, chess clubs and arts and crafts workshops
- Our Stay Well Exercise Program, which introduces adults age 60 and older to special exercises, relaxation techniques and principles of good nutrition
- Computer Training Courses, where we offer a range of classes appropriate for older learners, including beginning classes on using computers, the Internet, email, Microsoft programs, Google, Facebook and other technologies and social media
- Our Mail-A-Book Program, which offers homebound individuals free delivery of library materials right to their door.

Materials include books in large print, audio books, e-books, e-readers, movies and games. Mail-A-Book also offers lectures, classes, book discussions, music and theater, debates and chats by teleconference, video and live stream.

In addition to these wonderful age-specific programs, Queens Library offers many other programs that serve our many diverse communities.

Queens Library's Job & Business Academy (JBA) provides specialized training and learning opportunities, with an emphasis on technology training, to job seekers, aspiring entrepreneurs, and business owners. By combining JBA's individual counseling, in-person workshops, and online learning opportunities with complementary services provided by the Library's Adult Learner Program and New Americans Program, Queens residents participating in training become better prepared for the modern workforce. Individuals seeking to access JBA services get started by using Job Map, an innovative online job skills assessment tool developed by Queens Library. Based on assessments and one-on-one interviews with JBA staff, customers are enrolled in structured job search classes, workshops and technology training classes. Last year, JBA provided over 40,000 hours of job search and technology training to more than 25,000 customers. Seven hundred and twenty customers completed job skills training, of which 60% reported new employment, a promotion or pay raise.

These are just some of the many empowering programs and services Queens Library offers. As an organization, we pride ourselves on recognizing and adapting to the ever-evolving needs of our local communities.

Queens Library's New Americans Program (NAP), which recently celebrated its 40th anniversary, was established to provide special services to the area's many new immigrants. NAP organizes workshops in the languages spoken by Queens' immigrant communities that assist new immigrants in adapting to life in the United States and offers programs that celebrate the culture of the diverse ethnic groups in Queens. The program works closely with the Adult Learner Program, the Job & Business Academy, and community libraries to assess local needs and link residents with existing system-wide library and social services to enhance civic engagement. Approximately 48% of the residents of Queens County are foreign born, making this program a vital resource to many. This past fiscal year, 2,494 students participated in NAP's ESOL classes, 4,018 customers attended its premier coping skills workshops, and 6,983 customers attended 66 cultural arts programs celebrating the various immigrant groups of the borough. The New Americans Corner initiative, in partnership with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services and the NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, dedicates a space in every single one of our facilities where immigrants can find information and resources to become U.S. citizens.

Queens Library is also at the forefront of bridging the digital divide in our communities. We are the borough's technology hub. For too many Queens' residents, the digital divide presents barriers to education, job opportunities and tasks of daily living. Approximately 30% of the borough does not have broadband access or a computer at home. In certain communities, that number is much higher. The Library is proud to have provided well over 300,000 computer and Wi-Fi sessions to the public and 3,000 computer learning classes for over 20,000 customers, as well as responded to over one million technical assistance questions.

Queens Library is constantly exploring new opportunities and partnerships to reach our customers, such as our partnership with Google to provide coding programs, and our DigitalQ initiative, which allows customers to use their smartphones and tablets to access free digital copies of popular magazines. Our libraries serve as centers of community where people, regardless of immigration status or socioeconomic background, have equal access to information and the latest technology.

While everything we provide to our customers is free, staffing, materials and maintenance for these programs and services require significant investment. With demand for our programs and services at an all-time high, it is critical for library systems across the state to receive the funding necessary to keep up with the needs of our customers.

In Fiscal Year 2017, we received \$8.2 million in Operational and Construction aid, for which we are very grateful. However, we still require additional funding to meet the ever-growing needs of our customers. For example, if we had additional funds, we could expand STACKS afterschool programming to every library in our system. It could save us from having to turn away eager individuals from our Adult Learner Program, or the young adults looking to sign-up for free pre-HSE classes. It could provide more materials and programs for teens and older adults. It could allow us to help thousands more people find a job or become more marketable in the workplace. Every dollar really makes a difference because our materials and services transform lives.

Maintaining our 65 locations and aging infrastructure is also a short- and long-term challenge for the Library. The average community library is 61 years old. More than a third of our buildings are over 50 years old. They are heavily used, and most were not constructed to accommodate the traffic that we experience on a daily basis due to the growth in demand for our services. Additionally, the vast majority of libraries are poorly configured to meet the demands of the digital age – with too few electrical outlets, too little space for classes, group work, or space for individuals working on laptop computers. Our challenge is to modernize our facilities, maintain our critical infrastructure and to expand our public spaces in order to thrive in the 21st century.

Queens Library has more than 900,000 square feet of library space, and all of it is heavily used. Just imagine the scope of maintaining our physical spaces. We have identified a capital need of nearly \$375 million over the next 10 years to modernize all of our facilities and bring them into a state of good repair. Therefore, state construction aid is very important to us. We thank the Governor and the State Legislature for increasing State Construction Aid last year to \$24 million, of which we received \$1.4 million. This funding is crucial for the Library to leverage other municipal funding sources, giving us the ability to complete projects on time and on budget. It is used for critical projects that are of high priority to Queens Library. This year, we have allocated these funds to begin sorely needed renovation work at the Bay Terrace and Richmond Hill community libraries that will focus on modernizing the buildings to meet the new needs of our customers. We are excited to begin work there; however, additional funds would help us make great strides in addressing our system's needs. An increase in this capital funding allocation would allow the Library to complete other critical, high-priority capital projects.

Queens Library transforms lives by cultivating personal and intellectual growth and by building strong communities. Our vision is a vibrant, informed, cohesive, and empowered society. I am proud to say that Queens Library does a fantastic job in meeting the needs of our diverse constituency. Our accomplishments have been many, but so too are our needs. With your help and increased generosity, we will be able to meet those operational and capital needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your committee, Chair Barrett.