



NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LIBRARIES AND EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY

ANNUAL BUDGET OVERSIGHT HEARING ON FUNDING PUBLIC LIBRARIES

January 10, 2018

Good morning. My name is Iris Weinshall and I am the Chief Operating and Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer of the New York Public Library (NYPL). I am joined by George Mihaltses, Vice President for Government and Community Affairs. I would like to extend a warm welcome to new Chairwoman Didi Barrett and a thank you to all of the members of the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Libraries and Education Technology for the invitation to testify today. We are grateful for the opportunity to speak on behalf of our millions of patrons and to emphasize the importance of State funding to successfully deliver all the programs and services we offer.

Who We Are

Founded in 1895, the NYPL is the nation's largest public library system, including 88 neighborhood branches across The Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island and four world-renowned research facilities: The Stephen A. Schwarzman Building on 5th Avenue, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem, the Science, Industry, and Business Library in Mid-Manhattan, and the Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center. Our collections hold approximately 45.2 million research items and just over 23.8 million circulating materials. In Fiscal Year 2017, NYPL hosted over 18 million visits and offered over 93,000 programs to nearly 2 million attendees.

Why Our Services Matter More Than Ever

Your increase in support over the last several years demonstrates that you know our services matter more now than ever. According to the 2017 study by The National Center for Children in Poverty, Bronx County has the highest percentage in New York State of all children under 6 years in poverty.¹ We at the library know that poverty often means fewer educational opportunities and diminished economic prospects. To that end, we have witnessed a significant growth in circulation for the first time in six years, with the most striking increase in the circulation of our print children's materials. This is driven in part to the success of our early literacy programming efforts across the Bronx and all of our branches. All together, this brings our total circulation up nearly 5% from last year, despite a national downward trend.² The importance of reading and literacy for lifelong success cannot be overstated, especially for economically disadvantaged communities.

We were also proud to help our youngest readers with the launch of the successful “New Start” fines forgiveness program. The program provided one-time amnesty to eliminate a known barrier to access for many New York City families: suspended borrowing privileges due to accumulated fines of more than \$15. At our Countee Cullen branch in Harlem nearly 40 percent of households reported income under \$25,000 and about 30 percent of the branch’s total kids and teens cards were blocked. With this effort, over 196,000 children citywide now have access to vital resources again bringing them back to the library and to reading and learning.³ The fine amnesty program was made possible through a generous gift from the JPB Foundation, and covers all three of the City’s library systems.

New York State Funding

¹ http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_1190.pdf

² <https://lair.nypl.org/news/%3Aag5zfm55cGxpbmRyYW5ldHIRCxlETmV3cxiAglCC5lOWCww>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/18/nyregion/new-york-city-libraries-amnesty-childrens-fines.html>

An investment in libraries is an investment in the social, cultural, educational, and economic well-being of our state, providing an accessible and inclusive environment for everyone. The state fiscal year 2017- 2018 investment of \$95.6 million in libraries, \$20.2 million of which went to NYPL, has been fundamental to providing services to enrich the lives of all New Yorkers. This funding included formula-based Basic State Aid, which supports the purchase of new books and materials, binding and conservation supplies, key maintenance and cleaning expenses, and salaries needed to carry out our work. We also received Designated State Aid to support some of our research needs at the Schomburg Center, Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library, the Science, Industry, and Business Library and vital resources to CUNY graduate students.

The Heiskell Library, serving all of New York City and Long Island, provides talking books and magazines and braille for people who are blind, visually impaired, or are otherwise physically unable to read standard print. Heiskell also provides barrier-free public programs, conducts one-on-one computer classes using assistive technology, and much more. Along with the New York State Library, Heiskell is one of only two libraries in the state that is part of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, a branch of the Library of Congress. Last year, Heiskell had over 77,000 visits and circulated over 516,000 items to this special group of library patrons. The counties served by the Heiskell Library have a population of more than 11 million people, representing nearly 57% of the state's total population.

Additionally, the Library receives capital support through the NYS Public Library Construction Grant Program. These funds, approximately \$2.9 million this current fiscal year, go towards supporting capital projects throughout our system. The funding, which primarily supports the capital needs of our branches, has recently been used for renovations of the Mid-Manhattan and Washington Heights libraries. The funding was also used for a major renovation of the

Schomburg Center in Harlem. The Schomburg Center renovation,⁴ included a complete renovation of the second floor reading room, an expansion of its Rare Book Collection vault, a new conference room, and improved staff spaces. We also received a number of capital allocations through the State and Municipalities, or SAM, capital program. SAM program funding is being used on key projects, including a new library for Van Cortlandt in the Bronx and Macombs in Harlem.

With more than a third of NYPL's libraries—32 branches—at least 100 years old and the average age across all three library systems at 61 years,⁵ we are always working against a rapidly aging infrastructure. The New York State Library Construction Grant Program and the State and Municipalities Program help us improve our buildings and address some of our most pressing physical resource needs. The growth in capital funding over the last several fiscal years has been much needed and again, we thank you. While this allocation is significant, our buildings still require over \$450 million in capital repairs, and we look forward to working with you to address the capital needs of libraries both in our three boroughs and throughout the State.

How our patrons benefited in FY17

To improve our education technology offerings, optimize inventory, and reduce cost, NYPL has been working with partner libraries and library systems to simplify and streamline how our patrons access e-content. In 2016, we launched SimplyE, the new app that gives our cardholders the ability to browse, borrow, and read more than 250,000 e-books from the Library's collections. Brooklyn Public Library incorporated their collections into the app in February 2017, expanding the collection by an additional 150,000 books. We worked diligently during the development of SimplyE to ensure it works for all readers. Any New York resident

⁴ <https://www.nypl.org/press/press-release/october-16-2017/schomburg-center-research-black-culture-celebrates-extensive-two>

⁵ <https://nycfuture.org/research/re-envisioning-new-yorks-branch-libraries/P3>

can apply for an NYPL card online and get access to the Simply E app. With usership steadily increasing, we now have over 76,000 users and intend to continue to expand and improve upon this service in the coming year. We are proud to be among the leaders in eReading accessibility.

We also updated our privacy policy⁶ in accordance with industry best practices and national standards for privacy to make it more user-friendly and transparent. Our investment to improve technology not only protects our patrons from increasingly sophisticated hacking technology, but it also increases wifi bandwidth and speed -- both of which are required for accommodations for people with disabilities. These services go far beyond captioning and video relay. There are video descriptions for people with visual impairments, and many necessary features for people with cognitive and intellectual disabilities to ensure information is conveyed in real time.

Looking Forward - how we can help ‘more people read more’ with your help

Our patrons, your constituents, have benefited immensely from the capital improvements, advances in education technology, increased branch hours, and new programming that we wouldn't have been able to provide without your recent steady increase in aid. As we look to the 2019 fiscal year, we join our colleagues in strong support of continued and more robust funding that will allow us to offer more programs, fix our libraries and enhance digital capacity in an effort to advance equity through technology for all New Yorkers. On behalf of the NYPL and the millions of patrons who count on the services we provide, thank you for your commitment to inspire learning, advance knowledge, and strengthen our communities. We look forward to working together to help more people read more.

As always, I am available to answer any questions you may have.

⁶ <https://www.nypl.org/help/about-nypl/legal-notice/privacy-policy>