NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LIBRARIES AND EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY

FUNDING PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Dec 13, 2016

Good morning. I am Norah Yahya, Associate Director for Government and Community Affairs at The New York Public Library (NYPL). I am joined by Michael Alvarez, the Associate Director for the Central Bronx network. 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 appreciate the opportunity to testify on the impact State funding has on the mission of pu blic libraries in New York and are grateful to the Committee for your unwavering support.

Who We Are and What We Do

Founded in 1895, NYPL is America's largest public library system, with 88 neighborhood branches across The Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island and four world class research facilities: The Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the Science, Industry, and Business Library, and the Library for the Performing Arts (LPA) at Lincoln Center. In pursuit of our mission to inspire lifelong learning, advance knowledge, and strengthen our communities, NYPL

provides a vast collection of resources and a variety of opportunities for all New Yorkers.

As you all are well aware, the need for library services has never been greater. According to the most recent data, nearly 25% of families with children under 18 years old in New York City are living below the poverty line.[1] Additionally, the City Comptroller reports that 27% of all NYC homes lack internet access and 17% of homes do not have a computer.[2] Nearly half of our City's residents speak a language other than English at home, and of those people, 47% of them do not speak English well.[3] Across our state, 20% of K-12 young people are responsible for taking care of themselves when they come home after school.[4] At NYPL we are working hard to provide programs and services to meet the very real needs of our patrons.

In fiscal year 2016 (FY16), NYPL hosted 17.6 million in-person visits and 29.8 million visits online. With over 2 million NYPL library card holders from across New York State, FY16 saw our system's circulation of top 22 million items. Through our commitment to expanding free and open access to materials and information, NYPL continues to offer free WiFi and access to computers at all of our locations. With over 3 million computer sessions in FY16, it is clear that New Yorkers have a broad and extensive need for

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[1] https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/14_5YR/DP03/1600000US3651000
[2] https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/Internet_Inequality.pdf
[3] https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF
[4] http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/policystatefacts.cfm?state_abbr=NY

access to information. Beyond our circulation and technological offerings, NYPL held over 93,000 educational programs to just under 2 million patrons in FY16. These included, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, after school programs, early literacy programming, free coding classes for young people, job search help, college application assistance, and resume writing services just to name a few.

At NYPL, we have also made every effort to reach beyond the walls of our branches, and extend services into our communities with programs like *Library HotSpot*. A partnership with Google and the City of New York, *Library HotSopt* has loaned out over 10,000 WiFi hotspots to families throughout the city who previously lacked internet access at home. With an upcoming expansion of the program, we plan on lending out an additional 5,000 hotspots in the coming year. Furthering our effort to strengthen our communities, NYPL opened the first permanent library on Riker's Island, allowing our incarcerated patrons increased access to information. We have also redoubled our commitment to serving New Yorkers most in need. Currently, the population in our City's homeless shelters hovers around 60,000.[5] Partnering with the New York City Department of Homeless services in FY16, we worked to educate our staff and volunteers about homelessness and expanded program offerings into multiple City homeless shelters.

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[5] https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/dashboard/dhs_data_dashboard_charts_FY-2016-Q2.pdf

New York State Funding

Serving as safe and inclusive institutions that reach every community across New York, it is clear that an investment in libraries is an investment in all New Yorkers. The state fiscal year 2016-17 investment of $96.0 million in libraries, $20.2 million of which went to NYPL, has been instrumental in supporting the services we provide. For example, last year's New York State aid to NYPL helped support the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the nation's preeminent archive documenting the global experience of people of African descent. State aid also funded support services for the blind and visually impaired at our Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library. Further funding was provided for our Science, Industry, and Business library and to support collections that assist CUNY students and researchers. From ESOL classes, and free internet, to early literacy programming, and open access to 54.4 million research and circulating materials, New York State funding helps to provide your constituents with the opportunity and tools they need to thrive and fully participate in our society.

For all of the progress I just mentioned, I would like to say "thank you." Thank you for investing in our State's libraries and providing New Yorkers with the programs and services they require. I would also like to thank you for the State's investment in library

infrastructure. As beneficial as state aid to libraries and library systems is, the efforts

that state funding supports, and the progress that it represents would be difficult, if not

impossible to achieve without the preservation and development of our facilities. In state

fiscal year 2016-17, New York State's Public Library Construction Grant Program has

provided NYPL with $2.4 million in capital funding to help us expand, improve, and

maintain the buildings and physical resources we need to continue on our mission. With

that funding we were able to make critical improvements to the Schomburg Center for

Research in Black Culture in Harlem and currently, we are in the process of

constructing a brand new Van Cortlandt branch in The Bronx. Again, thank you. These

efforts, as substantial as they are, are still a small step forward in addressing our

outstanding capital need of over $400 million. Up-to-date and properly functioning

facilities are an imperative component on providing the services our communities need

and deserve.

Moving Ahead

With your help, we have expanded hours, increased programming, renovated and built

more facilities, acquired more materials, and hired more staff. We are grateful for these

steps forward and the State resources that have made them possible. For the past five

years, we have seen reliable increases in state aid for libraries and library systems. We

have also seen meaningful increases in the Public Library Construction Grant Program.

Today, I join my colleagues in supporting continued and more robust increases to both

funding vehicles because if this trend continues, I have little doubt that we will achieve

even more.

Again, thank you for all your support and for this opportunity to testify. I will remain

available to answer any questions you may have.