Good afternoon. I am Linda Johnson, President & CEO of Brooklyn Public Library. Thank you, Speaker Adams, Chairs Osse and Brannan, and the committee members for the opportunity to testify on the preliminary budget, and to our Brooklyn delegation and the entire City Council for supporting New York City’s libraries.

Today we ask that you continue that support and restore the Council’s $14 million Libraries Initiative—essential operational funding which was not carried through in the Fiscal Year 2023 preliminary budget. We also ask the City for a sorely needed capital allocation of $85 million.

In the wake of the pandemic, libraries are poised to help rebuild a more equitable New York, but we need functional buildings and adequate staffing in order to remain open to the public six or seven days a week.

With 217 branches across all three boroughs, including 61 in Brooklyn, libraries provide a safe, dignified and absolutely free public space to every New Yorker in every neighborhood. Our librarians, technology resource specialists and other staff build longstanding relationships with the communities they serve, giving them the ability to assess the needs of those communities and meet them, whether with ESOL and High School Equivalency classes, homework help, or Storytime in Spanish, Kreyol, Urdu or eight other languages.

This is what makes the Library the most deeply trusted, democratic, and far-reaching institution in our city.

Prior to the pandemic, Brooklyn Public Library welcomed over 9 million visits in a single year, with more than 15 million books checked out and 1 million program attendees. In March 2020, forced to shut our doors for the first time in our 125-year history, we adapted many of those programs to digital platforms with huge success, producing over 7,000 virtual programs in the first year for 1 million attendees, from personalized job assistance to grief support groups.

We began reopening in the summer of 2020 with grab-and-go lobby service and by the summer of 2021 had welcomed patrons back into all available branches to browse the collection and use computers, printers and other critical technology.

Brooklynites continue to return to their local libraries and venture in for the first time. So far, in fiscal year 2023, more than 35,000 people have signed up for new library cards at their local library. We’ve seen over 600,000 WiFi sessions and physical checkouts are climbing toward pre-pandemic levels. As Omicron is receding, we have been able to resume indoor in-person programming once again, including a concert last week with the Harlem Chamber Players that was at capacity.

At the same time, the demand for virtual programs and services continues to be robust. Last week, more than 600 people tuned into a panel about Lenape history via Zoom; we have seen more than 40,000 new e-card holders; and e-book checkouts have soared, with a record-breaking 350,000 checkouts in January alone.
As ever, online or in person, libraries are centers of literacy. We equip New Yorkers with the reading skills they need to learn about the world, succeed in their lives and participate fully in our society.

We also believe everyone in our city should be digitally literate. In the world of libraries, we’ve long known how many New Yorkers live on the wrong side of the digital divide: 800,000 in Brooklyn alone. The pandemic farther widened that divide and made it visible to all. New Yorkers need broadband and digital skills in order to access city benefits, search and apply for jobs, connect with healthcare providers, complete homework and much more.

That’s why, when we were forced to close our doors, we installed antennas on the roofs of 50 branches to amplify WiFi beyond our walls and worked with the Department of Transportation to create outdoor library spaces. We published a guide to accessing the FCC’s Emergency Broadband Benefit—a monthly subsidy for home broadband—and trained librarians to help patrons complete the application which is, ironically, online. We loaned hotspots to Adult Learning students and our Older Adult Literacy Navigator helped our patrons interact via Zoom. We recently outfitted a new Techmobile with WiFi, laptops, and more to take tech workshops on the road to high schools and senior centers.

In addition to being the largest provider of free WiFi and tech access in New York, libraries are the largest hub for career services and aspiring entrepreneurs. We’re the sole public hub for jobseekers in 64 percent of the city’s neighborhoods and the only local, public resources for small business owners in 67 percent—including many places where minority and immigrant owned businesses are still reeling from the pandemic.

Our Business and Career services include personalized resume and career coaching, as well as financial literacy workshops. Our annual PowerUp! competition provides intensive mentorship, classes and seed funding for aspiring entrepreneurs. This year, 70 percent of participants had never before owned a business; 68 percent were women; and 56 percent were Black. All of them are now better equipped to achieve their goals and enrich their communities.

Civic literacy is also of utmost importance to libraries. At the Civic Commons at Central Library, Brooklynites can apply for a passport or IDNYC card. They can also meet with immigration attorneys for free, join study groups for the citizenship exam, or get help preparing their taxes.

Health literacy is paramount to libraries, too. We continue to partner with the City’s Test and Trace Corps, distributing free at-home Covid test kits at 23 branches. We recently offered walk-in vaccines at five branches so children could get their shots in a familiar, friendly environment and leave with a reward: their own copy of Where The Wild Things Are. Beyond COVID, we offer nutrition education, support navigating Medicare and other health coverage, meditation classes and more.

To ensure everyone in Brooklyn has access to these and other resources, we also deliver library services beyond our own walls. In lockdown, our Older Adult Services team regularly called to check in on dozens of homebound patrons in our Books by Mail program. Throughout the crises at Rikers, BPL lent books to incarcerated patrons virtually and via mail, and we’re working to resume in-person service there. Each week, our redesigned bookmobiles visit shelters for families experiencing homelessness, and we hope to soon reconnect with schools and senior centers.
At this moment, our city faces widespread learning loss, disproportionate unemployment among communities of color, and the effects of extreme social isolation and fragmentation. Thankfully, libraries have the experience and expertise to address these challenges. With our partners at Queens and New York Public Libraries and within the Adams administration, we are working to design new programs—and also adapt and scale ones that have succeeded before.

But again, we can only do this work with functional buildings and adequate staffing, which is why our fiscal year 2023 preliminary budget request prioritizes restoration of the Council’s Libraries Initiative: $14 million across the three systems, including $3.9 million for Brooklyn. This funding allowed us to continue providing service throughout the pandemic and without its restoration, we risk having to cut our already insufficient branch repair budget, cut our collections budget, and eliminate positions.

Like other agencies, Brooklyn Public Library was asked to absorb a PEG in the current fiscal year, which we can withstand if we forego hiring for existing vacancies. But operating without full staffing is challenging. With the Omicron surge, we endured numerous closures throughout the system and therefore had to reduce hours. Resuming in-person programs, in addition to Sunday service, is pushing us to the limit of our capacity to operate.

Apart from staffing, the other cause of library closures is failing infrastructure: long outdated HVAC systems, leaking roofs and broken boilers. In Brooklyn alone, we have over 1 million square feet of city-owned buildings to maintain with $250 million in deferred maintenance and no recurring unallocated capital funds to depend on. It means that year after year we’re forced to respond to emergencies rather than perform preventative maintenance; to choose which projects make piecemeal progress while others stall; and all too often, to dip into our operating budget.

Ultimately, this problem needs long term attention and we will look for your assistance in advocating for libraries in next year’s ten-year capital plan. For now, we ask that you do all that you can to support increased capital funds for libraries in this year’s budget.

We’ve proven that with adequate funding, we are capable of creating inspiring public spaces. In October, we opened Adams Street Library, the first new Brooklyn Public Library branch in four decades, to serve the communities of DUMBO, Farragut, and Vinegar Hill. The building is a model for 21st century library design and it shows: it’s bustling with activity every day.

This year, we look forward to opening new libraries in Crown Heights, Brooklyn Heights, and East Flatbush—not to mention the new Center for Brooklyn History, the largest archive of Brooklyn history in the world, now housed at the former Brooklyn Historical Society building on Pierrepont Street.

Every community deserves an inspiring library with services tailored to its needs—and there are profound needs across the city in this moment. In order for New York to recover from the pandemic—all the suffering it has wrought and the inequities it’s laid bare—our city must invest in public space and public services for all New Yorkers. Located in every neighborhood and trusted by every generation, libraries are uniquely positioned to help New Yorkers rebuild a more democratic, more cohesive city. I urge you to invest in your communities by investing in public libraries. Thank you.
Good afternoon, my name is Tony Marx and I am the president of The New York Public Library (NYPL). Founded in 1895, NYPL is our country's largest public library system. We operate 88 neighborhood branches across three boroughs: The Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island, as well as four world-class research centers: The Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the Thomas Yoseloff Business Center at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library, and the Library for the Performing Arts. I would like to thank City Council Speaker Adams, Committee Chair Ossé and the members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today on the Mayor’s Fiscal Year 2023 Preliminary Budget. I also want to extend a warm welcome and congratulations to our new council members. You have joined a committee whose work is critical to the well-being of all New Yorkers.

As we all prepare to move forward into a new chapter of recovery and renewal, it is important to acknowledge that public libraries are uniquely positioned to support all of the city’s diverse communities with a wide range of free programs, services, materials, and more. We were there for New Yorkers during the pandemic—most recently at the end of 2021 with the rise of the Omicron variant, when, thanks to our library staff, we managed to operate with minimal closures and continue serving New Yorkers who needed us during yet another difficult stage in this crisis—and we will be there for what comes afterward.
To do so, we rely on the City’s ongoing strong support. We are pleased to see that the Mayor’s Fiscal Year 2023 Preliminary Budget does not include a cut to libraries, underscoring their importance to supporting city initiatives (libraries, for example, have been on the front lines in the battle against COVID-19, providing space for pediatric vaccines and testing, as well as distributing free at-home test kits) and to New Yorkers in general. Still, with the current economic climate and City Council non-baselined funds potentially at risk, there are concerns about the ability to serve New Yorkers and to continue growing key programs and services that are needed now more than ever. We are hoping that City Council funds received last year will be restored and baselined, and that the new needs requests made by each system will be met. In NYPL’s case this request includes expenses for library materials, non-capitally eligible infrastructure costs, and funding for the operation of the new Polonsky Exhibition of the New York Public Library’s Treasures, which supports educational enrichment for teachers and students across the city.

While we offer a full slate of programs—job search assistance, technology training courses, ESOL and citizenship classes, book clubs, author talks, financial literacy and small business assistance, etc.—we are currently focused on several specific areas to best support New Yorkers as we move forward. One such area is that of youth and education initiatives. As the city emerges from this crisis, we know that teens and youth have been disproportionately impacted by pandemic, widening learning gaps that already existed between high and low needs communities. A series of new initiatives launched in 2021 have been designed specifically to address inequalities in access to education and provide better spaces for teens to learn, grow, and develop. In the fall of 2021, we launched our new drop-in after school program, which allows us to serve more children at each branch than any previous after school model, and focuses on homework help, tutoring, and career exploration. We have also made a firm commitment to expand services for teens, including the establishment of new teen centers.
across our system. Our flagship teen center is at our newly-transformed central circulating library, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library (SNFL), which opened last year. On any given weekday you can easily find over 50 teens from across the city there utilizing books, computers, programs, staff expertise, or a state-of-the-art recording studio. The need is clear. From the relatively short period between July 12 to November 16, 2021, 141 programs and events were held in the center with over 800 attendees, including teen led programs. The goal of these centers and their programmatic offerings is to provide teens with the foundation and support that they need to succeed in an increasingly digital and competitive workforce, and give them safe, welcoming spaces to gather, talk, and learn. Another aspect of our commitment to the education space is our focus on early literacy, kindergarten preparedness, and support for students and educators. Our MyLibraryNYC program gets class sets of books into schools while our recently-launched Center for Educators and Schools makes library materials and services accessible to educators and easy-to-employ in classrooms (curricula using primary sources, educational projects tied to our Polonsky Exhibition of The New York Public Library’s Treasures, etc). We are now in the planning stages of another initiative to get books into New Yorkers’ homes to keep. Studies make it clear that being surrounded by books and a culture of learning at home correlates to improved early literacy rates, so while we continue to provide books to borrow, we also want to ensure children—particularly those 0-5—have home libraries, and that their caregivers have resources and tools to help maximize the impact of those libraries. In addition to giving away books—creating an immediate connection between the recipients and libraries, reading, and learning—the Library will also provide resources to caregivers to maximize their impact: tips for reading to children, book recommendations, and so on. All told, the goal of this “books in the home” initiative is to spark a lifelong love of reading in our youngest patrons and position them for success in school and the rest of their careers.
Another aspect of our commitment to children and teens is the citywide elimination of late fines on books and other circulating materials, announced last fall. This removed a significant barrier to access for our most vulnerable neighbors and had an outsized impact on kids and teens. In October 2021, almost 113,000 library cards belonging to kids and teens would have been blocked because of fine accruals, meaning that children and teens essentially could not access ideas, knowledge, and information because of something out of their control. As we evaluate the results of fine elimination, we have already seen increases in visits and circulation immediately following this policy shift, and expect those numbers to continue to grow. This work eliminates any obstacle between our children and access to the tools they need to learn outside the classroom, solidifying a strong ecosystem of learning in New York City, and supporting the city’s educational efforts.

Another key aspect of NYPL’s current priorities is our capital program. If one thing is clear following the isolation of the pandemic, it’s the value of open, free, public spaces for people to gather and be with others. Even amid the challenges of the pandemic and the current environment of strained resources, the Library has maintained its commitment to investing in the physical infrastructure of our branches to ensure that they are best positioned to meet the needs of our communities. We know that when we are able to renovate our spaces or build new ones to better accommodate the needs of New Yorkers, they are used more. Woodstock Library in the Bronx completed a major renovation in 2018. In its first full year post-renovation versus its last full year pre-renovation, the branch saw an 8% increase in visits and a 20% increase in circulation. Washington Heights Library in Manhattan similarly saw a 47% increase in visits, a 45% increase in circulation, and a 105% increase in program attendance in its first year post renovation in 2014. The same trends were observed at Stapleton Library in Staten Island and Kingsbridge Library in the Bronx following their renovation and expansion into a new location in 2013 and 2011, respectively. While the pandemic disrupted service, making comparisons
difficult, we expect similar increases at our new Van Cortlandt Library in the Bronx and Macomb’s Bridge Library in Harlem, as well as our completely transformed central circulating library, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library (SNFL), built with $150M in city funds. These spaces contribute to vital social infrastructure, and important centers for communities, making their renovations critical. This is why, almost immediately after the March 2020 closure, we advocated for the ability to safely continue ongoing capital projects, such as the construction of a new branch in Staten Island (Charleston, opening on March 16), a new Roosevelt Island Library (opened), a renovated New Amsterdam Library (opened) and Bloomingdale Library (opened), and renovations of five 100-plus year-old Carnegie branches in high-needs areas: Melrose and Hunts Point in the Bronx, Fort Washington and 125th Street in Manhattan, and Port Richmond in Staten Island. These locations have been in dire need of capital upgrades for decades; their top-to-bottom renovation—made possible with funding committed by the City under the 10-year capital plan—allows us to meet community needs for improvements such as ADA accessibility, dedicated spaces for teens and children, and facade restoration, among others. While all of this work is exciting and valuable, much more is needed; NYPL recently identified $277.4M in systemwide capital needs. Priorities identified include: complete renovations of the Hudson Park, Edenwald, West New Brighton, Francis Martin, Spuyten Duyvil, and Countee Cullen branches; state of good repair projects such as HVAC, Boilers and ADA accessibility; technology upgrades; and funding of project shortfalls. We cannot overstate the importance of including libraries in the City’s 10-year capital plan, which only happened once, in 2015 (FY16 Executive Plan). The only way to appropriately plan for and address the systemwide capital needs of the city’s 217 public library buildings is through consistent, long-term capital funding and planning. And this can only happen if the City regularly funds libraries in the 10-year capital plan, as is customary for other city infrastructure and agencies.
Additionally, we are open to innovative ways to improve our spaces: for example, last year we broke ground, along with the City, on a project that will bring the Inwood community a new, much-needed, state of the art library, as well as 100 percent affordable housing and other amenities. This innovative model, utilizing a combination of public and private funds, allows us to provide the City with improved library spaces, reducing the need for coveted capital funds. Looking ahead, we are open to discussing other projects of this nature, as the ultimate goal is to best serve New Yorkers now and in the future.

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented New Yorkers with protracted, unpredictable challenges for nearly two years now. But whether it was our historic pivot to digital and virtual services, our ability to safely and quickly restore our in-person presence, or provide innovative initiatives like outdoor programming, the Library has fully maintained its commitment to equal access to books, knowledge, and education for all, regardless of this crisis’ twists and turns. As we look to brighter days ahead, we stand prepared to adjust to a new normal that requires us to do more than we ever have. The Library is poised to both maintain new initiatives while also restoring and preserving existing programs and services as we proceed with our focus on youth, education, and our capital agenda. But it is only with your continued support that we can meet this moment.

Thank you for your time, I am happy to take any questions.
Statement by Nick Buron, Chief Librarian & SVP, Queens Public Library

New York City Council’s Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations Fiscal Year 2023 Preliminary Budget Hearing

March 8, 2022

Good afternoon. I am Nick Buron, Chief Librarian and Senior Vice President at Queens Public Library (QPL, Library). On behalf of the Library and our President & CEO Dennis Walcott, it is a pleasure to be here.

Thank you, Chair Ossé, Speaker Adams, and the members of this esteemed committee for the opportunity to speak with you today about our budget priorities for the next fiscal year. QPL is excited to begin its partnership with our new chair, new Speaker, a new class of Council Members and a new Mayor. We are filled with tremendous optimism regarding the future of this great city and are eager to work together as we do our part to ensure a full recovery for New York City.

The City Council provides significant support to New York City’s public libraries. It would be impossible for us to meet the needs of our customers without it. Therefore, on behalf of every person who works at and is served by Queens Public Library, thank you.

To characterize the last two years as challenging would be an understatement. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every individual, organization, and government in the world. It has changed the way we interact with one another and has forced us to reconsider what “a new normal” means. March 16 will mark two years since the unprecedented closure of all of our physical locations to the public because of the rapid proliferation of the coronavirus disease in our city.

I am happy to say that despite all the difficulties we have faced as a borough and city, QPL has been robustly reemerging, safely reintroducing in-person activities and playing an integral role in New York’s recovery.

On February 28, after a pause in response to Omicron, QPL resumed indoor programming, which will gradually expand as long as public health conditions continue to improve. We will also continue our virtual programming, which has been an outstanding resource throughout the pandemic, providing customers with vital information and services and opportunities to learn, especially critical during the mass quarantine phase of the pandemic. We have conducted over 29,100 virtual and in-person programs, grab and go activities, and outreach activities from March 2020 through the end of January 2022. In that same period, we circulated over 3.9 million e-books, e-magazines and other e-materials, and added over 123,000 items to our digital collections in order to meet the demand of our customers in an evolving remote world. Our live and archived programs, such as Hip-Hop DJ sessions with
Ralph McDaniels and our 24-hour Black Health and Healing Virtual Summit, were viewed nearly 1.1 million times.

The Library provides a vast array of services to the communities we serve. While there is not time to name everything we do, I would like to highlight a few things.

Our Adult Learner Program (ALP) provides services, resources, and lifelong learning opportunities to the diverse communities of Queens. 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.

QPL’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. Helping new Americans and the formerly incarcerated prepare resumes and practice interview skills and helping new business owners grow their business are just a few of the services JBA provides.

QPL operates a Mail-a-Book program. Mail-A-Book service offers homebound customers the convenience of having library materials delivered to their door free of charge. During the past fiscal year, we lent over 17,600 items to homebound individuals. The Library also offers interactive virtual programming for the homebound so they can connect to and learn with others.

QPL is committed to the education and development of children and teens. Our Toddler Learning Center (TLC), open to young children ages 18 – 38 months, is a special program where parents learn about nutrition, speech development, early literacy, and parenting skills, while toddlers become familiar with social environments at a young age.

Our Kick Off to Kindergarten (K2K) program is for children ages 3 and 5. To prepare children to read, K2K develops knowledge of early literacy skills with guided activities and story times for families, while promoting at-home literacy and conflict analysis strategies for adults. This past fiscal year, 164 families took part in 70 program sessions.

QPL’s Children’s Library Discovery Center, located at our Central Library, has hands-on interactive exhibits and learning labs led by a dedicated Discovery Team. They enable children ages 3-12 to find information and inspire interest in books, reading, and learning.

QPL developed the STACKS program, which is a free enrichment program for children in grades K-5. It is designed to enhance a child’s learning experiences through age-appropriate activities in a safe and welcoming environment. The program’s goals are to help build their social, emotional, and academic skills. During this past fiscal year, we held 275 program sessions, serving nearly 1,200 children.

QPL operates two dedicated Teen Centers that serve as safe spaces for middle school and high school students to complete homework assignments, do research, participate in programs and leadership initiatives, and explore their creativity. Our Teen Centers host a wide variety of programs, including, but not limited to: test prep, college and career
readiness; health and recreation programs that focus on awareness, self-advocacy, and education; and technology programs such as STEM presentations, video game clubs, and a dedicated recording studio with audio equipment.

Our Summer Reading program remains very popular. Nearly 15,000 young people participated in over 2,200 program sessions this past summer.

QPL has worked closely with the City in the effort to combat COVID-19 and to engage our communities during these challenging times. Whether it was providing host sites for H+H COVID-19 Test & Trace, vaccination sites, or NYC Department of Education Learning Labs, polling locations for early voting, Primary Day and Election Day for the Board of Elections, or conducting 2020 Census outreach to ensure an accurate count, Queens Public Library has been there serving the people of the borough.

Most recently, we have been working with the Adams Administration on several initiatives that include increasing civic awareness and engagement in the policy process and supporting the ongoing battle against the pandemic.

Three of our locations – East Elmhurst, Peninsula and Laurelton – served as COVID-19 vaccination sites for children aged 5-11, from December 2021 to February 2022. Over that period, 100 children were inoculated from this disease.

Ten of our locations — Arverne, Central, East Elmhurst, Far Rockaway, Kew Gardens Hills, Long Island City, McGoldrick, Peninsula, Richmond Hill and Rego Park —began distributing COVID-19 test kits to the public on February 14. As a result of our staff’s enthusiasm and commitment to the health and well-being of our communities, over 10,000 kits were given away that first week. Given the high demand and success of this initiative, eight more of our locations — Bayside, Glen Oaks, Glendale, Jackson Heights, Lefferts, Rochdale Village, South Ozone Park and Steinway — began distributing test kits on Tuesday, February 22. To date, we have distributed more than 23,000 coronavirus test kits to the public, and we plan to expand the effort.

Mayor Adams’ Fiscal Year 2023 Preliminary Budget instituted a 3 percent cut to our operating budget this fiscal year, but rescinded a proposed Fiscal Year 2023 funding cut of 3 percent to QPL. Fortunately, we have found ways to absorb the reductions for this year without affecting hiring or service levels. However, if things change in the Mayor’s Executive Budget and cuts are re-proposed for Fiscal Year 2023, staffing levels, public service hours and our collections would likely be impacted.

With 66 locations in every neighborhood and more than one million square feet of library space, QPL has a large capital program with a variety of needs. Maintaining our physical spaces is no small feat, and requires the city to invest in our libraries so they are the modern, inspiring spaces the public deserves. In our Ten-Year Capital Plan submitted to the City, we have identified a need of $270 million over the next 10 years. Of this, we need $98.6 million in Fiscal Year 2023 to address projected funding deficits, as well as to begin the process of initiating tier one priority capital projects in need of immediate attention. An additional amount of $13.3 million is needed to launch those same tier one projects.
The Mayor’s and City Council’s capital investments in libraries over the last several years have had a significant and positive impact on the state of our facilities. However, it is clear that needs remain, and your continued support is crucial.

When the Library is forced to make emergency critical infrastructure repairs, we do not have the luxury of waiting for the capital procurement and construction process to play out. In order to prevent our buildings from being closed to our customers for months on end, the Library finds itself in an unfortunate position where operating funds – funds that should be used to serve our customers through programming and other services – must be used for capital repairs. Therefore, it is important that the City Council continue to advocate for New York’s library systems to receive dedicated funding in the Mayor’s Ten-Year Capital Plan. The current process of piecemeal fundraising is inefficient as it often takes several budget cycles before a project is adequately funded. Being able to have a dedicated capital budget will allow the Library to effectively plan and maintain its capital portfolio.

Equally important, we respectfully request that the City Council, at minimum, reauthorize its $14 million Library Initiative, of which QPL receives $3.9 million. This funding is vital as it allows us to address non-capitally eligible and critical maintenance projects, as well as support staffing levels, programs and materials.

As the pandemic moved us to an increasingly digital world, it laid bare the disparities that exist concerning broadband connectivity in the local communities we serve. Libraries have been at the forefront of bridging the digital divide, and in order for us to continue to work towards closing it, we need City Hall’s support. We have secured over 2,200 hot spots to lend our customers, but we know more are needed. As we serve people virtually, we need help from the Administration to maintain a robust level of e-content and e-material for our customers. As we emerge from this pandemic and transition to a new, post-COVID-19 world, demand for our services will rival the Great Recession. We have communicated to the Administration a need of $7.9 million in new operating funds in Fiscal Year 2023 in order to meet this anticipated demand.

Every day, we transform lives by cultivating intellectual and personal growth. As the center of community life, we build strong neighborhoods through the multitude of free programs and services we provide. For the Library to meet the needs of our customers, especially our most vulnerable populations, we respectfully ask for your continued financial support and ask that you prioritize QPL and New York City’s libraries in the Adopted Fiscal Year 2023 Budget.

Chair Ossé, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.