



**Statement by Bridget Quinn-Carey, Interim President and CEO Queens Library
New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Libraries
and Education Technology**

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Good morning. My name is Bridget Quinn-Carey, Interim President and CEO of the Queens Library. I would like to thank Chair Abinanti for holding today's important hearing and inviting me to talk about the many programs and services Queens Library provides for over 2.3 million people in Queens County, and to discuss the impact of state operating and construction aid on the Library and some of the challenges it presents.

Every day, Queens Library provides the broadest range of services to the broadest range of New Yorkers. Whether it is a family looking to give their pre-school aged child an educational head start, a senior citizen looking to keep her mind sharp, or any age group in between, there is a free, high-quality program at our libraries.

Queens Library is a national leader in the delivery of varied and innovative services to our youngest library users. We are the first public library in the country to collaborate with the Department of Education to provide a library-based, accredited, universal pre-kindergarten program. We graduated our first class from the Woodhaven community library in June, and began instruction at a second site, the Ravenswood learning center, in September 2015. Queens Library also offers a unique Kick-Off to Kindergarten (K2K) program, an eight-week school readiness program for children ages 3-5 and their caregivers. K2K was developed and piloted by Queens Library professionals at eight community libraries. Last year, an independent evaluator assessed the program and the results showed that 65% of the children spoke a language other than English at home. After 8 sessions, 85% of those students showed measurable educational attainment, which is quite a testament to how effective this program has been. Due to its success and popularity, we are expanding the program, with plans to have in every community library in Queens.

In Fiscal Year 2015, Queens Library served an average of 4,500 six-to-fourteen year olds every school day. Recognizing the potential and 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 which build emotional, social, and academic skills. We are currently offering this program at 18 of our community libraries, and the response has been tremendous. Due to the program's popularity, we have waiting lists at 15 locations. The programs at the other three locations will imminently reach full capacity. 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 the largest library-run literacy program 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
- Literacy / English Learning Groups
- Computer-Assisted Instruction
- Monthly Cultural Workshops & Center Outings
- Independent Learning Materials
- Case Management

In this past fiscal year, we provided nearly 150 sixteen-to-twenty-four year olds with academic preparation toward a high school diploma, intensive case management, internships, and job shadowing.

Our Adult Learner Program (ALP) provides services, resources, and life-long learning opportunities to the changing communities of Queens. In addition to our core initiatives, ALP offers Adult Learning Resources for students and educators, including 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 English for Speakers of Other Languages (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. This past fiscal year, we served more than 5,000 adult learners, and more than 3,200 students participated in our structured 12-week ESOL program. Additionally, approximately 1,100 adults received Adult Basic Education and pre-HSE instruction. Our Adult Learner Program is widely popular and in high demand. This year, we were able to expand the services we provide to 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. Additional funding is needed in order for us to accommodate everyone who is 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, the Queens Library offers many other programs that serve our many diverse communities.

Queens Library's Jobs and 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 the Job & Business Academy'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 will 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 53,000 hours of job search and technology training to more than 43,000 customers. 650 customers completed job skills training, of which 59% reported new employment, a promotion or pay raise.

Queens Library's New Americans Program (NAP) 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 programs that celebrate the culture of the diverse ethnic groups in Queens. The program works closely with the Adult Learner Program, the Job and 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. Initiatives such as our New Americans Corner, 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 go and find information and resources to become a U.S. citizen.

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 or a computer at home. In certain communities, that number is much higher. You can well imagine how a child's education

will suffer without learning critical technology skills, or how an adult can become disconnected without access to information and services available only online. You can enter any library and you will see our computers in constant use. In fact, Queens Library hosts more than 3 million public access computer sessions a year. And thanks to our partnership with Governor Cuomo and Google, Queens Library lends Google tablets free of charge to library card holders. The tablets are pre-loaded with a wealth of information that is useful with or without wifi access. And for those who don't have internet access at home, the Library also lends mobile hotspots for free to anyone with a library card.

These are just some of the many empowering programs and services being offered at Queens Library. As an organization, we pride ourselves on being able to recognize and adapt to the ever-evolving needs of our local communities. Our libraries serve as community centers where people, regardless of where born or socioeconomic background, have equal access to information and the latest technology. Our free services and programs literally serve to enrich the lives of those who access them.

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 2015, we received \$6.3 million in state aid. While we are very grateful for this, we are still underfunded. The Library would have received an additional \$657,000 if funding was provided in accordance with the State Education Law formula, utilizing the 2010 census. This shortfall is significant. If we were fully funded under the law, this money could have provided the 1,000 seats we needed for our ESOL program. It could have provided a Stacks afterschool program at every community library. It could have provided for more materials for our teens and older adults. It could have allowed us to help thousands of more people find a job or become more marketable in the workplace. Every dollar really makes a difference, and it impacts the lives of the people we serve.

Maintaining our aging infrastructure is a short and long term challenge. The average community library is 61 years old, with a quarter of the branches built over a century ago. They are heavily used, and most were not built to accommodate the traffic that we see 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. Therefore, we are faced with the challenge of modernizing our facilities, maintaining our critical infrastructure, and expanding 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. You can imagine the scope of maintaining our physical spaces. We have identified a capital need of \$400 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, and we appreciate the consistent funding level of \$1.2 million annually. This funding allows 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've allocated these funds to begin sorely needed renovation work at the Baisley Park and Richmond Hill community libraries that will include the addition of new public space. We are excited to begin work there; however, there are more needs we can address with your increased support. An increase in this capital funding allocation would allow the Library to complete critical, high-priority capital projects and keep the Libraries in good repair.

Our mission is to provide quality services, resources, and lifelong learning opportunities through books and other formats to meet the informational, educational, cultural, and recreational needs and interests of anyone who comes to us in safe and comfortable facilities. 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, Chairman Abinanti.