

**Testimony of Brooklyn Public Library
Assembly Standing Committee on Libraries and
Education Technology Hearing: *Funding Public Libraries*
November 6, 2015**

Good morning. My name is David Woloch and I am Brooklyn Public Library's executive vice president of external affairs.

I would like to thank Chair Abinanti and the members of the Committee on Libraries and Education Technology for the opportunity to testify today. Thank you, Assembly Members Clark, Otis, Palmesano, Saladino, and Solages. We are grateful to you—and to Assembly Speaker Heastie and Ways & Means Chair Farrell—for your support of New York's public libraries. Thanks to your leadership, Brooklyn Public Library's state funding has increased in each of the past four years.

Brooklyn Public Library is the fifth-largest library system in the United States, with 60 branches that serve more than one million patrons every year. We maintain a collection of more than 3.5 million materials. Our branches house more than 1,100 public computers, and we are the largest provider of free wireless internet access in Brooklyn. And I am pleased to report that all of Brooklyn Public Library's branches are now open at least six days per week, thanks to increased investment from by the City of New York.

While the majority of our funding comes from the City, your support is also essential to our service. The state provided approximately \$7.1 million in operating funds this year to support the programs hosted by our branches and the books that line their shelves.

These funds help us provide multilingual print and digital materials, early literacy programs, job search assistance, citizenship preparation courses, and many more free services and resources.

We are very thankful for your continued support, and we are confident that with a restoration of our funding to its pre-2008 level, we could do an even better job of serving the Brooklynites who are turning to our branches in record numbers to learn, to be entertained, and to connect with their neighbors.

While we have seen increases in attendance at programs for people of all ages, demand is particularly strong for our family programming. At BPL, early literacy initiatives like Ready, Set, Kindergarten! prepare future students to succeed in the classroom. Ready, Set, Kindergarten! participants explore literacy, science and math through music, stories, art and play—and they receive free materials to continue the learning and fun at home.

The Today's Teens, Tomorrow's Techies program teaches digital skills to students 14 to 18 and prepares them to serve on BPL's volunteer team, where they help patrons make use of the Library's many free technology resources.

When school is not in session, we combat "summer slide"—the decline in literacy skills students often experience between school years—with our Summer Reading program.

Participation in these programs continues to rise. Our Story Times sessions for children five and under saw a nearly 10% increase in attendance last year, while attendance at our programs for school-age children rose 30%. We expect more than one million people to attend at least one Brooklyn Public Library program this year, an increase of 8% over last year.

Demand also remains high for our collections. Our branches host materials in more than 30 languages, and we provide a wide range of books and other resources to patrons who cannot visit us in person: We host "Books 2 Go" collections at 143 senior centers and nursing homes—and also at several correctional facilities. We have established reading rooms at Rikers Island and in seven homeless shelters.

In total, Brooklyn Public Library operates in 177 "outposts" across the borough—supplementing the work of the 60 branches that serve every Brooklyn neighborhood. This is, needless to say, an enormous undertaking—and we need all the support that we can get from the City and state to serve patrons inside and outside of our branches.

In addition to the operating dollars that you provide us, we are very grateful for the \$1.3 million in capital funds we receive each year from the state. This year, your support will help us renovate Central Library's plaza, a community gathering space that is home throughout the year to concerts, children's programs, swing dancing classes, and much more.

The repairs that you will help us complete will make the plaza safer and more welcoming for our patrons. But to give you an idea of the context in which Brooklyn Public Library plans its capital improvements projects, consider that Central Library alone faces more than \$67 million in urgently needed repairs.

Throughout the entire BPL system, we are confronted with \$300 million in unmet capital needs.

As grateful as we are for the \$1.3 million we receive annually from the state, and the approximately \$15 million we receive each year from the City, please keep in mind that nearly one-quarter of our branches face more than \$5 million in unfunded repairs.

Without sufficient funding for preventative maintenance and planning, we are forced to spend most of our capital dollars on emergencies. And as anyone who has ever managed a library, or even owned a home, will attest, emergency repairs are the most costly repairs of all. Sadly, this is a familiar story for our peers throughout New York, and Brooklyn Public Library urges state lawmakers to increase the capital funding available to libraries.

It has been a good year for Brooklyn's libraries. Our hours have increased; our staff are among the best and brightest library professionals in the nation; and we continue to provide world-class services even as our buildings face extraordinary capital challenges.

But there is much work yet to be done.

Our capital needs will only grow more dire without adequate support from our funders. And while our increased hours and additional staff are helping us serve more patrons, our borough's needs are immense, and we need your help to meet them.

We need more support—both operating and capital—from our city and our state in the years ahead to ensure that New Yorkers can access the books they enjoy, and the resources they need, in buildings that are safe, comfortable, and inspiring.

We thank you for your support of Brooklyn Public Library, and look forward to our continued partnership.