

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,
LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL
INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING - VIRTUAL ROOM 2

B E F O R E: Chi A. Ossé,
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Eric Dinowitz
Amanda Farias
Shahana K. Hanif
Crystal Hudson
Rita C. Joseph
Farah N. Louis
Francisco P. Moya
Sandra Ung

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Diana Ayala
Deputy Speaker

Tony Marx,
President of the New York Public Library

Linda Johnson,
President and C.E.O. of the Brooklyn Public
Library

Nick Buron,
Chief Librarian of the Queens Public Library

Gesille Dixon,
Vice President of the New York NYPL, New York
Public Library Branch Services and Programs

Kevin Kelley,
Brooklyn Public Library Coordinate of School Age
Services

SERGEANT HOPE: And computer rolling.

SERGEANT BIONDO: And recording to the Cloud underway.

Good morning and welcome to today's remote New York City Council hearing for the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and Intergroup Relations. At this time would all panelists please turn on their video for verification purposes and to minimize any disruptions please place all electronic devices to vibrate or silent mode. If you'd like to submit testimony please send via e-mail to testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again, that is testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you for your cooperation.

Chair Ossé, we are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Good morning everyone, I am Council Member Chi Ossé, Chair of the New York City Council's Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations.

Thank you for joining us this morning for this point hearing on oversight using New York City libraries to help overcome BIPOC Youth learning losses due to Covid-19.

Before we begin I would like to acknowledge my colleagues and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, International Intergroup Relations who have joined us so far today. Good morning to Council Members Ung, Council Member Moya, Council Member Hudson, Council Member Joseph, Council Member Dinowitz and Deputy Speaker Ayala.

Today we're here to learn about what the New York City public libraries are doing to help reverse the learning losses experienced by students during the pandemic with a particular emphasis on finding out what is being done to support black, indigenous and young people of color and understand how the Council may better support these efforts. Additionally, the Committee will hear resolution number 57, sponsored by Deputy Speaker Diana Ayala, which calls upon Congress to pass the present... to pass and the President to sign the Puerto Rico Self-Determination Act of 2021 or H.R. 2070.

Arguably, one of the most distressing and critical disruptions of the Covid-19 pandemic has been experienced within our academic communities. Covid-19 sidelined the process of routine learning

protocols and has at every stage posed barriers and challenges to the educational development of the city's 1.1 million students who live and attend school in New York City. Then, the New York City school system was called upon to pivot from a full time in-person classroom environment to an all remote virtual learning model in March of 2020.

It comes as no surprise that the city's three library system comprised of the New York Public Library, the Queens Public Library and the Brooklyn Public Library quickly sprang into action. Like public schools the libraries quickly transitioned to an all virtual programming environment. In doing so, they began the critical task of bridging the educational and informational divide for students in New York City. Not only did the libraries create and upload educational content, they also introduced free Wi-Fi and laptop loan programs to enable students to continue learning from home.

While schools did begin to slowly transition back into brick and mortar classrooms and despite valiant efforts by all the stakeholders challenges have continued to do want students... to

détente students, parents and educators and learning losses have accumulated.

Today education advocates and experts have expressed deep concern about the aggregate learning losses suffered by students and the response from the city in meeting and addressing this challenge. Research suggests that the widespread and rapid switch to remote schooling will have negative long term academic consequences and predict what they term to be Covid-19 slide in which students show patterns of academic setbacks throughout the extended closure like what is typically seen in lapsed learning habits and after summer vacation. Students also show... studies also show students from marginalized backgrounds tend to experience more severe learning losses than the counterparts and now researchers are concerned that low income students, students with disabilities and other at risk populations will fall even further behind their peers noting that the numbers of students who end up needing to repeat at least one grade could rise due in large part to the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In 2021 approximately 14,800 New York City school children opted to become homeschooled. This number reflects an 88% increase in homeschooling since the pandemic began with the largest increases occurring in districts with a higher share of low income students. While reasons for this vary by family the decision to continue homeschooling for many parents and caretakers who are able to work remotely and educate their children at home stems from seeing firsthand the challenges their children face in a virtual environment, especially, when some parents witness what some describe as a curriculum that wasn't culturally responsive. In fact, many parents who had been longtime skeptics of the children's education grew concerned by what they deemed anti-blackness and bias in the curriculum and were reportedly shocked to overhear the children's online classroom discussions that confirmed their suspicions such as routinely omitted references to black history, the Black Lives Matter movement and LGBTQ affirming resources.

While homeschooling only accounts for 1.5% of the city students and is difficult for many families to do, the numbers are significant. The

number of homeschool students in the six highest poverty district increased 119% while homeschool students in the lowest poverty... six... in the six lowest poverty districts increased 79% since the onset of the pandemic.

It's important to remember that many parents and caregivers who worked outside the home were not always available to provide regular educational tutoring and support, the children left to learn and navigate a new and challenging virtual school environment.

Finally, the United... the United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, warned in March we will mark two years of Covid-19 related disruptions to global education. Quite simply, we are looking at a nearly insurmountable of loss to children's school. While the disruptions to learning must end, just reopening schools is not enough. Students need intensive support to recover lost education. Schools must also go beyond place to learning to rebuild children's mental and physical health, social development and nutrition.

Today we look forward to hearing from three libraries about their commitment to continue to

provide vital and necessary intensive supports UNICEF referenced to help our students regain lost ground due to the pandemic. Libraries continue to be a hub of critical resources that ensures students are able to keep up and stay on track and most importantly continue to move forward with their educational goals.

Our libraries have played a critical role in aiding students in marginalized communities and it is critical to ensure sufficient funding for libraries content... to continue to do this... do this important work. We look forward to learning about the diverse and creative programming that will address their needs and look forward to hearing... hearing from the advocates and other interested stakeholders.

I would also like to thank the community members, advocates, library staff and... who have joined us today. We are grateful for your partnership and look forward to learning how we can better support you. Before I turn to our moderator to read the oath I would like to thank my staff, my Legislative and Budget Director Mae Bucherpong Batana (sp?), my Chief of Staff Naomi Hopkins, as well as our Committee staff Brenda McKinney, Committee

Counsel Cristy Dwyer, our Legislative Policy Analyst and Aliah Ali, Finance Unit Head and I would also like to acknowledge Council Member Louis who is also here.

Finally, before we begin with the oversight portion of today's hearing I would like to give my colleague Deputy Speaker Ayala an opportunity to give remarks on her resolution, resolution number 57, which the Committee will also be hearing today.

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Good morning and thank you. I'd like to thank Chair Ossé for allowing us to hear resolution 57 today.

Resolution 57 calls on Congress to pass and the President to sign the Puerto Rico Self-Determination Act of 2021 H.R. 27 originally introduced 2020 H.R. 8113 co-sponsored by Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez and Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. H.R. 2070 recognizes the right of the Puerto Ricans of the people of Puerto Rico to call a status convention through which the people would exercise their natural right to self-determination and to establish a mechanism for Congressional consideration of such decision.

This bill establishes a process for the people of Puerto Rico to vote on the political status of the territory. For too long Puerto Ricans have been exposed to policies that were not in the best interest of their well-being. The realities of this neglect has affected every aspect of Puerto Rican lives economically, politically and environmentally.

The Self-Determination Act would allow Puerto Ricans the option to chart a course to change the destructive effects of colonization and allow for new leadership to oversee the process of the colonization.

Puerto Rico faces a myriad of challenges, economic devastation, government mismanagement and are still dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. Add to this the agony of dealing with the current pandemic, which has caused additional loss of life to... and distress too many families. Inadequate assistance from the Federal Government further exacerbates the fiscal crisis and limits the tools that it has to restore a healthy economy.

The SCOTUS ruling that came down last week is a slap in the face to so many on the island. It is unconscionable, discriminatory and

unconstitutional to give benefits to some U.S. citizens and not to others. Just because some chose to live on the island as their home they are not... they are being penalized by taking away benefits that would otherwise have them thrive. Yet again, with this decision the Puerto Rican people are at the mercy of a government that doesn't adequately represent them in Congress and can't depend on Congress to fight for and recognize their rights. The path to a healthy and thriving economy should start with the voices of its residents. Now is the time to politically empower Puerto Ricans for their voices to be heard and to be granted the opportunity to decide their path and vision for the future. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you Deputy Speaker. I am now going to turn it over to the moderator, our Committee Counsel Brenda, to go over some procedural items and I would also like to acknowledge Council Member Farias.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so much, Chair.

Good morning, my name is Brenda McKinney, I'm Counsel to the Committee on Cultural Affairs,

Libraries and International Intergroup Relations for the New York City Council. Before we begin I'd like to start with some housekeeping items and remind everyone that you will be on mute until called on to testify when you will be unmuted by the host, a box will pop up and please click it.

I will be calling on panelists to testify today. Please listen for your name to be called on and I will periodically be announcing who the next panelist will be. For everyone testifying today please note that there may be seconds of delay before you are unmuted and we thank you for your patience.

All hearing participants should submit written testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov. The Council will also accept written testimony up to 72 hours after the hearing.

At today's hearing the first panelist to give testimony will be representatives from the libraries followed by Council Member questions. At present we do not have any members of the public register to testify, but we will move to the public after the libraries if we receive registrants during the hearing.

Council Members who have questions for a particular panelist should use the raise hand function in Zoom and I will call on you after the panelist has completed their testimony. We will have one round of Council Member questions today.

While we do not need to swear in the libraries today, we will ask that the libraries testify in the following order. First, the Brooklyn Public Library followed by the New York Public Library and finely... and finally the Queens Public Library.

I will also state the names of today's witnesses for the record, but again we will not be reading the oath. We have President Tony Marx, President of the New York Public Library, Linda Johnson, President and C.E.O. of the Brooklyn Public Library, Nick Buron, Chief Librarian of the Queens Public Library, Gesille Dixon, Vice President of the New York NYPL, New York Public Library Branch Services and Programs and Kevin Kelley, the Brooklyn Public Library Coordinate of School Age Services.

So thank you, President Johnson. You may begin your testimony when ready from Brooklyn.

LINDA JOHNSON: Thank you very... thank you very much. Thank you Chair Ossé and members of the Committee.

I am Linda Johnson, President and C.E.O. of Brooklyn Public Library and I... I appreciate the opportunity to share how the library worked to minimize the pandemic's disruptions on the lives of BIPOC Youth over the past two years.

Even as we were focused... even as we were forced to close our doors for the first time in our 125 year history, Brooklyn Public Library staff swiftly pivoted to offer as much support as possible to youth and their families, including those grappling with remote schooling.

While I'm confident that our efforts helped blunt the impact of the pandemic for many families there is of course much, much more work to be done. We believe that our work to keep the BIPOC Youth connected to the library and engaged in our programs is addressing learning loss. The rapid disruption of the school routine had a damaging impact on the city's children, particularly those with the least resources and our staff made it their priority to minimize interruption and services for

all patrons, learners and especially youth and families.

Overnight we transitioned to virtual programming, we leveraged our means to ensure a robust digital platform, hosted six New York City learning labs in our branches, created at home kits to maintain connections with our patrons and provided books and resources to support their growth and enrich their learning outside of the classroom.

As the largest provider of free Wi-Fi in Brooklyn we are keenly aware of 800,000 plus Brooklynites who lacked digital access and have worked over the years to help bridge the digital divide. While our branches offer free internet access, technology and classes the pandemic amplified disparities in underserved communities as the world went virtual those who needed us most became even further removed, so we placed signal boosters on the rooftops of our buildings to extend our internet signal 300 feet in every direction given even into nearby homes and businesses. Our internet is available to patrons 24 hours a day whether they are inside our libraries or outside.

Additionally, we published a guide to understanding the new FCC emergency broadband benefit. Our librarians... and our librarians have been helping families sign up for the subsidiar... subsidy... subsidy to receive low cost broadband services.

Libraries are of course no strangers to learning loss. Every summer we launch summer reading intended to minimize learning loss while school is out for summer vacation, also known as summer slide. Our approach is to meet children and families where they are. Librarians emphasize finding the joy in reading and develop fun activities, games, specialized book lists and craft projects to keep children connected to literacy. The impact of remote schooling over the pandemic surely intensified summer slide. While the library had to offer summer reading virtually we supplemented with thousands of grab and go kits, take home STEM based arts and crafts, creative games and book giveaways. At-home kits were particularly successful as many children did not have books or materials at home and caregivers were starving for children's activities.

This year summer reading at Brooklyn Public Library kicks off on June 4th welcoming people

back to the library with exciting events and activities at all of our branches as we jointly celebrate summer reading and our 125th Anniversary year.

An early solution to help struggling students was boosting our online resources, offering free personalized help in math, reading, writing and science, a 24/7 writing lab and practice tests including SAT preparation. We continue to offer an extensive list of free interactive learning tools meant to support students and educators. In addition, Brooklyn Public Library has run a homework help program for years with the assistance of trained volunteers. Homework helper's tutor elementary and middle school children individually or in small groups while also teaching them to use the libraries directories, indexes, web-based tech and reference materials. And with the East New York Reads Initiative, a collaboration of 11 organizations in East New York, East Harlem and South Jamaica, we are partnering with educators to offer homework help sessions for all students from kindergarten through fifth grade at the Arlington-Cypress Hills and New Lots libraries.

One of the most impactful ways we increased access and equity for our patrons was the permanent elimination of late fines last fine along with Queens and New York public libraries. In Brooklyn this amounted to clearing late fines and related fees for over 50,000 children and teens. Removing this barrier, which impacts lower resource communities that need us most means no one will be prevented from using their library, because of unpaid late fines. If their books are returned patrons will always be able to check out more.

Additionally, we took steps to further increase the diversity of books in our collection, created specific anti-racist book lists and programs, prioritizing books and displays that are more reflective of our children and revamped our story time collection to better reflect the diversity of our patrons and ensure that BIPOC Youth see themselves represented in our materials.

For children under the age of five we continue to focus on school readiness with our ready set kindergarten program in English... in English and Spanish. Families enjoy stories and activities designed to encourage the development of early

learning practices and the social, emotional skills that help young children adjust to their first classroom environment.

Playing, singing and having reading materials at home is critical to helping families of young children with early literacy. Thanks to the Council's funding of the city's First Readers initiative in the first half of fiscal year 2022 alone Brooklyn Public Library engaged young children and their families in 166 virtual story time sessions with more than 7,600 views. We held over 100 in person outdoor literacy programs with an attendance of 4,000. In addition to distributing learn at home kits and play recipe cards and hosting educator and parent and caregiver workshops on a host of... and... and a host of early literacy topics. Since the onset of the pandemic our children's librarians have held thousands of virtual story times in more than a dozen language often attracting more participants in... than in person story time could ever fit in a single branch.

Brooklyn's youngest patrons were not alone in experiencing hardship and learning loss. Young adults, particularly BIPOC Youth suffered the

impact of being isolated from their friends and school community missing milestones, processing trauma and grief and of course the senseless murder of George Floyd. Over the pandemic through a host of internships and volunteer opportunities teens stayed connected with their library. Today's teens, tomorrow tech youth students, 85 of whom... 85% of whom are BIPOC signed up to learn new computer skills through a two week technology institute after which they put those skills to work helping patrons use library technology. This beloved program is now in its 17th year. Collaboration is strong between the cohort and young adults and librarians of tomorrow, a hands on internship program for high school students with an interest in library careers. Story teen, an internship made possible through the city's First Readers initiative engages high school students with an interest in literacy and early childhood education. Participants learn to use... learn to assist in a variety of children's programs including offering story time... offering story time. Young adults in the current cohort speak a variety of languages including Arabic, Bengali, English, French, Hindi, Korean, Mandarin, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish,

Urdu and Yoruba adding a beautiful diversity of story time offerings.

In addition to virtual programming we are equally committed to better serving young adults in our physical spaces. We proudly host a Best Buy Teen Tech Center at the Kings Highway Library. It is an interactive learning space featuring work stations, tech equipment, collaboration areas and a recording studio. Teens are encouraged to use the space to produce music, animations, robotic constructions and more.

A growing number of our branch libraries are outfitted with teen friendly spaces including comfortable furniture, flexible layouts and charging stations and over the next few years a third of our branches will undergo.. undergo complete renovations with new teen spaces separate and apart from the children's area. During the community engagement sessions held for these renovations we asked teens directly what they want in their libraries and their comments will inform the design of these new spaces.

The last few years have not been easy particularly for BIPOC Youth. While it is impossible to know how deeply the pandemic will impact our

children over the long term we know that our library staff worked tirelessly to offer support and meaningful opportunities to stay connected to literacy and learning. Librarians are as important now if they have ever been. It is only with your support that we can remain strong for the millions of people who depend on us every day. Thank you for your partnership and for taking time to explore this important issue.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so much President Johnson. We will now move to President Marx from the New York Public Library.

TONY MARX: Thank you Brenda. Thank and I hope you all can hear me.

Good morning everyone, I'm Tony Marx, the President of New York Public Library and I'm proud to be joined today by Gesille Dixon, a great veteran of the library system, newly recognized as our Vice President for Branch Programs and Services system wide.

It's... I wanna thank of course the City Council, Speaker Adams, Chair Ossé and the members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify and for

all you have done to help lead us and will lead us through these challenging days.

We know that these days have been so particularly pointedly challenged on our kids and teens who disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and by the widening learning gaps that Linda's already eloquently talked about that built upon the existing disproportions and inequalities of BIPOC Youth on the experiences of education and life in New York more generally and so this is really focused in on this... the... the... the... the tragic consequences of structural racism and inequality and then add the pandemic really focused in on BIPOC Youth and we need to respond as we have been building upon what we've done in the past and our expertise, particularly our amazing staff.

I'm gonna summarize the testimony, which you have in front of you, I'm also gonna rearrange it a little bit just to fol... give it a sense of what a student, a teen's experience is in the system and what we have and are and will be offering.

So of course the... the initial funnel for all of these education programs starts with early learning and with our story times. We... I think across

the city we get... we were getting before the pandemic about 2 million visits to those story times, about a million, half of those at the New York Public obviously pivoted to digital now rebuilding on the... in the... in actual. The other piece that we're adding to this is the research library. We have the most use... used research library on the planet, we have about 60 million items you know and this is generally been a place, this building, where people have just come at... at the high end of sort of research and you know more senior scholars. It's time to liberate the research library and put it to use for the community, which is what it was designed for, that's why it's a public library and to bring the library to all of our kids and teens through the schools and elsewhere, so we've created a new center for educator's and schools, the dedication which is to take our primary resources and make them the exciting centerpiece of school plans, curriculum plans, etcetera, digitally as well as physically using our new treasures exhibit making those the sort of the... the... the headliners if you, the bait if you will to get folks in, but also working with the Schomburg's curriculum project and others for lesson plans. We've got at the Schomburg

unit themes on slavery and abolition, black power and black women's stories all the way to the history of playgrounds in... in... in our students and patrons actually neighborhoods.

That also of course only works if we have collections as Linda also mentioned that reflect the interest of our patrons and the diversity of New York. We of course continue to make significant investments on our collections overall. In the last two years we've invested 3.3 million dollars in books, 345,000 in read alongs, 365,000 in world language materials, 1.9 million in E-books, because during the pandemic we lent 11 million E-books to keep our circulation up and as a life line to New Yorkers. We also provide subscriptions to our electronic resources, so many of these are specific and targeted and particularly useful for our BIPOC communities, but we also do local initiatives, so Aguilar and our Harlem branches are creating local community collections and those projects continue.

We know after the pandemic we need to refresh our collections in high need neighborhoods and we are establishing completely new collections in our five completely being restored or renovated

Carnegie libraries all in high need neighborhoods, Hunts Point, Melrose, Port Richmond, 125th Street and Fort Washington.

We also know that it makes a... that there's a huge gap in poor students, BIPOC students simply not having their own libraries at home in addition of we... of course using our libraries, borrowing, but kids need to have those libraries at home and they need to represent their interests and their own diversity, so we're going to distribute this summer half a million diverse books for students in these neighborhoods to develop their own... their own at home libraries that we can then add borrowed books to.

Linda's already mentioned our eliminating late fines in 2021. That meant for us 113,000 library cards, which were stupidly blocked for a policy that didn't work and didn't make sense and we've seen immediate increases, saw immediate increases in our visits and our circulation.

The... so story time, early literacy, the center for educa... for educators and centers, our collections, ending fines, all designed to encourage students and build on you know the intake of those

students. Then as the students get older they shift to our after school program, which we have a new model for that we started in fall '21. It's a drop in after school program in 20 of our branches in the historically marginalized communities, so that those students get the kind of after school offerings that students of more privilege and at fancier schools or different schools have as a part of their regular offerings, so we need to level that playing field.

We recruited a diverse set of tutors, these are everything from education students to retired teachers, lead tutors with 17 language rep.. with 17 languages represented upon them and they've been focusing on STEM programs, which of course excite the students and.. and bring them in. The.. we provide snacks, because heartbreakingly you know our students are coming to these programs hungry. I mean in New York City in 2022 that's you know, makes your head explode. We have additional tutoring support. We've hired teen reading ambassadors, so in.. in addition to the professional tutors we hire high school students, we pay them, we train them in literacy, so that they can teach the younger students, but we all know that when you teach you

also learn, so the teaching is going both ways in this and it's first jobs for these students, which is... sets the... sets them on the course for work force. So all of the attendees to these programs are really low socioeconomic BIPOC students and I'll just say from personal experience going into the branches as we've reopened these after school programs are taking off. They've taken over the at... the... the children's floors, they are full of life, everybody's rolling up their sleeves, Gesille's team is just sort of... it is, not sort of, is doing just amazing work.

Then the summer comes, we've heard, we worry about the summer slide of course, so we've... we've got free events, take home activities, all kinds of resources as well as a six week STEM. Sorry, can you all still see me? Apologies. A six week STEM summer cruise, special events featuring BIPOC authors and illustrators, again, book giveaways, kits, it just you know it just continues. We have a system-wide NYPL Teen magazine, so that students can show off what they've done.

All of that leads eventually to our teen centers and I wanna sort of focus here. We are making a firm commitment to create teen... new teen centers

across our system to provide up.. as Linda described them, up to date technologies, spaces to gather and socialize, academic and socio emotional support, digital literacy. We've created a flagship here at our new Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library and on any week day afternoon it is just packed and these students are coming from all over the city, so we have to get these resources out into the communities. We'll be opening additional teen centers this summer in Wakefield, Woodstock, Van Cortlandt, Grand Concourse, Countee Cullen, Bloomingdale and West Brighton in Staten Island, all of course underserved neighborhoods.

And then finally after you've come together for this culmination of the teen center, which by the way we also hope will add civic engagement activities within the.. the STEM activities and we'll.. I'm sure we'll all be talking about that, then we need having brought the students in, then we need to help them figure out what their path out is and that means college as well as career pathway initiatives, helping students understand the complexity, and I know this well, 'cause I came from post-secondary education, how to apply for college,

how that's changed under Covid-19. We provide 101 counseling information sessions. We'll assist as well, not just for getting into college, but looking for jobs, we have a whole floor for that here at the Niarchos Library and again, creating satellites and we'll assist teens with resumes and cover letters. You can come look for a job, we'll help you start a job. We have an intensive college and career access network working on a... ACT and SAT prep, filling out financial aid forms and all of this I can give you the numbers, is BIPOC students and BIPOC participants.

Let me just conclude simple... to say simply, sorry, not so simply, let me find the right page. There is so much to do, that is why we are all here and the libraries, I think it's clear and Queens is about to reiterate, that we can and are doing more and ready to do even more than that. We see this programmatic focus as a fundamentally new partnership with the city for a new model of what the libraries can be. Here at the New York Public we spent 100 million dollars of private funds to work over the last decade to create these education programs that now give us the foundation on which we can build and

really have an impact in these communities. That's changed the model of what a branch library means. You know Gesille and her team have led us to say we can't just be passive space as essential as that is in these neighborhoods, we have to proactive education spaces and we need to focus in on the BIPOC students whose needs are the you know the... the strongest in this city at this juncture.

We are ready, we are clearly ready to step up, we are stepping up, we have... we need the city to join us in the partnership of support for these education programs, so that they cannot only be sustained again with partnerships with private as well, but sustained as well as grown at this moment in history, which is why we're all gathering this morning.

Thank you again, Mr. Chair, in particular.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank you so much, President Marx. Finally, we will hear from the Queens Public Library and Chief Librarian Nick Buron.

Mr. Buron, when you're ready.

NICK BURON: Thank you, Brenda.

Good morning, I am Nick Buron, Chief Librarian and Senior Vice President at the Queens Public Library and behalf of our library and our President and C.E.O Dennis Walcott, it is a pleasure to be here.

Thank you Chair Ossé and the members of this esteem Committee for the opportunity to speak with you today on this important subject. The Covid-19 pandemic uprooted normal life for all of New Yorkers and it is clear that the city's most vulnerable populations experienced the worst of the impact.

Queens, the most diverse Borough in the country, was the epicenter of the nation's outbreak. Communities were devastated leaving many people confronting the heartbreaking loss of family members, friends, colleagues and neighbors. Throughout the entire ordeal QPL remained committed to serving the communities of Queens and helping the city recover and rebuild. This includes remaining a reliable resource and community center for our younger library users, so that they can overcome the obstacles the pandemic has caused in their lives. 20% of the population of Queens is 18 years old and younger with

over 76% identifying as non-white. When we examine the age range of all QPL card holders we find that approximately 275,000 customers or 19% of our card.. cardholders are under 18 years old. It was essential for the library to move quickly when the New York City Department of Education announced schools were moving to remote classes to stop the spread of Covid-19 in March of 2020.

Despite the unprecedented disruption into our daily lives QPL swiftly transitioned from providing in person services to providing virtually programming and services, expanding our digital collection and secured additional education and personal enrichment resources for our customers. In addition, our specialized programs and services geared toward our younger audiences also transitioned into the digital world.

QPL developed the STACKS program, which is a free enrichment program for children in grades K through five to enhance a children's learn... children's learning experiences through age appropriate activities in a self and welcoming environment. The program is designed to help them build their social, emotional and academic skills.

And prior to the pandemic STACKS was operating in 13 enrichment sites and 11 homework centers in our library networks.

Our amazing staff was able to modify the program to fit in a virtual mode allowing any student to attend no matter their location and offering STEM workshops, art programs and more. This past year our staff interacted with students on a variety of activities including a writing Who Am I booklet and Important Women from History creating coin spinning and mini volcanoes and The Cat in the Hat STEM challenge on National Doctor Seuss Day and according to our voluntary provided data our STACKS 2021 summer session served almost 1,100 students of which 82% of those participants identified as non-white, while our fall sessions had similar percentage of non-white youth as well.

QPL has long prioritized minimizing learning losses that students experience during the summer months as you've heard often referred to as the summer slide. Our summer reading program not only encouraged students to read through the summer, but also aims to engage students through special programming.

In honor of 125th Anniversary we challenged readers to dedicate 125 minutes per week of reading. We offered virtual programming covering a diverse spectrum of interest such as multi-week series on exploration and cartooning, team program, photo and design and storytelling. Our staff curated specialized booklets for students in elementary school through high school and even the pandemic could not stop the enthusiasm of our youth inspiring the theme, "Reading Takes You Everywhere". Our summer reading program remained popular with nearly 15,000 participants and over 2,200 program sessions and the circulation of over 266,000 this past summer.

When the pandemic began QPL understood the needs of requiring extra tutoring and E-learning resources for our students. As a result, QPL began to offer Brainfuse, one of the nation's leading online tutoring providers to provide access to free homework help including live online tutoring and test prep in a wide range of subjects for K through 12 students and adult learners.

In fiscal year 2021 QPL uses access Brainfuse for over 3,500 sessions with more than 3,000 being live help sessions and nearly 6,000

database visits. In fiscal year 2021 QPL virtually hosted more than 3,800 children's programming's serving over 37,000 children. Programs specifically for teenagers yielded more than 8,300 teens participating in over 900 virtual programs. For our high school students who are exploring their options for the next phase of their educational journey, we scheduled 40 programs with an overall attendance of 770 students. College readiness workshops focused on an array of vital topics, such as time management and study skills, understanding the FASFA application process, financial literacy and helping students to understand which college might be right for them.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted many inadequacies, one of the most alarming being the lack of broadband access in households across New York City, particularly in Queens. Many homes in our borough do not have access they need for school children to complete their homework assignments and to connect with their cohort. Working to narrow the digital divide QPL loaned 475 mobile hotspots to students in 2020 through our ongoing collaboration with the DOE. In October of 2021 QPL announced an initiative funded by Sterling National Bank, National

Grid and the Thomas and Jeanne Elmezzi Private Foundation to provide over 250 hotspots of laptops for loan to the public at the LeFrak City, South Jamaica, Astoria and Long Island City Libraries. We have continued to prioritize secured hotspots for our customers and currently we have over 200 or 2,200 hotspots to lend, which are available at 25 locations throughout the borough, however, we know we need more.

As we begin reintroducing in person programming and slowly return to new kind of normal we are refocusing on how best to serve our younger customers. In January our Far Rockaway Teen Library located where 26% of the community is 18 and 65% identify as non-white we opened for the first time since March of 2020. The library provides teens in Far Rockaway with dedicated space that they can call their own helping them to explore their interests and learn outside of their classroom with their peers and trusted adults. It aims to stimulate creative thinking, encourage civic engagement and with the guidance of youth counselors and teen librarians help teens explore their school and career options. The center has a dedicated homework space and computer

area with free printing. The teen library will continue to provide robust virtual programming including Youth Justice Court, workshops on subjects ranging from technology, entrepreneurship and financial literacy to creative arts and health and wellness, college readiness and job search resources as well as a book club. It also had grab and go kits containing items such as craft supplies, bookmarks and writing journals to engage teens and projects outside the library.

As the teen library welcomes back its customers they are increasing their unique and creative programming with support from the Queens District Attorney's office the teens have started their own podcast interviewing celebrities including Funkmaster Flex. The podcast requires them to hone their skills through researching and compiling information and questions, public speaking, editing content and working collaborately... collaboratively as a team. Since it's reopening earlier this year the library has had over 6,100 visits.

Our public service staff are at the forefront of helping our children and teens in our 66 locations. The temporary closure of schools affects

how students socialize, complete tasks and focus their energies at the Cambria Heights Library Teen Center staff found the best mode of support to help their teens was helping them prioritize their goals whether it is assisting and researching higher education options or offering consistency and support while completing assignments. Additionally, Cambria Heights has been encouraging teens to read by updating collections with materials that speak with the interest and creating programs based on them.

Throughout the academic year the Long Island City Library infused trauma informed principles into their programs for school aged students, which includes reinforcing the fact that they belong to a safe and trusting environment where they can collaborate with peers and interact with mentors. Long Island City hosted an array of unique programming such as Code and Create, Ask Taisha, which is a several week class where young adults work in teams to develop virtual personal assistance, Grow with Google and Environmental Explorers. These after school classes motivated students to collaborate with one another to solve problems relevant to their lives. This is just a snapshot of the amazing work

our staff is conducting to get our youth excited to learn.

As we welcome customers back into our buildings we recognize that there were some that would still face barriers to returning. For too long our policies of imposing fines for late library material has discouraged individuals from accessing our services, especially youth. We temporarily suspended late fines during the pandemic and in October of 2021 Queens Public Library along as you hear with Brooklyn and New York Public Library Systems permanently ended the practice of charging late fines on overdue material and cleared all existing late fines on customer's accounts. This bold act cleared late fines on 289,000 accounts in Queens and unblocked almost 28,000 cards. Since the new policy was enacted on October 5th there has been a 10% increase in the number of impacted cardholders who borrow physical material compared with the month prior and 16% increase in request activities among impacted cardholders. We hope the new policy continues to encourage more people, especially our young customers, to return to their libraries or

become cardholders no matter what their circumstances.

Queens Public Library is dedicated to being there for our customers including our youth population who depend on us to provide for educational resources and extra-curricular programming that sparks their interest and curiosity.

New York City's three public library systems must be adequately funded in the new fiscal year in order to continue offering these high quality programs and services. For fiscal year 2023 we are respectfully requesting reallocation of the Council's Library Initiative at a minimum of 14 million dollars as well as an increase funding from the administration in the amount of 15.7 million. This funding will allow us to boost both physical and digital collections, fill vacancies and address emergency repairs and more.

In addition, all three public library systems need consistent and considerable capital investment to ensure our youth are learning and exploring in a safe, modern and welcoming facility that they deserve. In our 10 year capital plan submitted to the city we have identified a need of

270 million dollars over the next 10 years, 98.6 million for fiscal year 2023 alone. This funding will cover projected deficits and initiate projects in need of immediate capital attention.

Every day Queens Public Library transforms 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. In partnership with the city council and the Adams Administration we can continue to aid in the reduction of learning loss in our BIPOC youth communities.

Chair Ossé, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL MCKINNEY: Thank... thank you so much. I will now turn it over to Chair Ossé for questions. After Chair Ossé we will turn to Council Members for additional questions. As a reminder, we will call on Council Members on the... in the order that you raised your hand in Zoom using the Zoom raise hand function.

Panelists, please stay unmuted if possible during this question and answer period. Thank you and back to you Chair Ossé.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you so much, Brenda and I just wanna start by thanking you know President Marx, President Johnson and Mr. Buron for being here today as well as doing all of the... the work that you're doing at our amazing libraries. I really do appreciate just the support system that you all have been during the pandemic and still currently right now. While we are still in a pandemic there is this curve that... that we are dealing with in terms of addressing the education loss of our... our... our young children of... of New York.

So I wanna start with you know understanding the problem and a couple of questions that pertain to that and you know the first is... is you know the closure of city school in the March of 2020 to limit the spread of the coronavirus and subsequent abrupt transition to remote learning including only three days for teacher training had a serious impact on all areas of instruction.

What do the libraries view as the largest barriers to young people's learning losses during the pandemic?

TONY MARX: Well you know that's your way to begin. I mean it... it's all of it, right? I mean

it's the dislocation, the fright, the you know, you... the... you know not having regular school, you know kids need routines, we know that from you know our own childhood and our own kids and you know all that was disrupted in addition to you know not everyone has... you know think about what Nick said about the digital access, I mean you know we had everything online, it was amazing, I mean obviously we could've done more, but I thought it was an astonishing pivot and you know and yet what is it? One, 2 million New Yorkers don't have broadband at home at a moment when you can't go to school, you can't you know do your job, you can't live, I mean you know so the... sorry, the list goes on and on.

LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah, I would echo you know Tony's remarks. I think you know not having access to the web as you're trying to go to school via Zoom is obviously a non-starter and.. and the numbers are staggering. I have with me today, Kevin Kelley, who's a new employee of Brooklyn Public Library, but deeply steeped in libraries and working on this issue in particular.

Kevin, do you have anything to add?

KEVIN KELLEY: Thank you and I would say this is like a very complex question, but two things that jump out to me right at the... at the front is that digital access, yes, is like very important. 2 million people don't have Wi-Fi at home, but young people though they are born sort of what we call digital natives, still lack media competency, like the capacity to browse, to look and to engage with media in a constructive way in a way that they you know get in libraries... when they're with their librarian they get navigated through these digital spaces in a way that's more constructive maybe than they can do at home, because you know not every parent also is like as... that has the capacity to embrace the digital landscape in the way that a librarian is and then the other I would say echo's this like fear.

As we all know or as we know with kids part of their socio emotional learning is the need for in person relationships, a need for community and I would say that that is a huge barrier. I know that I felt it, I felt scared and alone and I'm a grown up and I felt disconnected from my peers and I think that children as we think about sort of moving out of

the pandemic if we want to address learning loss one of the ways I think that the library can address that fear is like being a hub of the community for these kids. I mean you've been maybe in a children's space pre-pandemic and you've seen the life and the vibrancy and that is like such a barrier if the kid doesn't have that life, that vibrancy, that support of the community, I think that that is bad and it's important that they have it and I'll... I'll end there.

NICK BURON: That was well stated Kevin, you're absolutely right about the digital access, about the socialization and I think you really highlighted the importance of what libraries do. We do help with the education, of course we do, and we are dedicated to information, but we are also dedicated to cultural and to recreation as well and so we bring all four of those... these things of great importance and to be able to connect to those young people who voluntarily self-identify and come to us every day physically you know really we needed to get them to come to us virtually as well and so now we have this great opportunity and I think it's good to... to look at the positive to really still be able to connect virtually and to bring people in person to

really hit you know hit them with those caring positive staff members that we have to really you know help them through this digital divide and this socialization and the need for a little recreation in a positive place as well.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Absolutely. Before I move on to my next question I do want to... Council Member Hanif is also on this hearing as well.

And I do wanna... I wanna ask you all how do the libraries identify those students that... that need the support? What were the demographics of the students who needed the most support? For example, racial backgrounds, grade level, household income, etcetera.

TONY MARX: I've got some numbers and there's some in the testimony. I don't know, Gesille, do you wanna... you're more closer to the ground on this.

GESILLE DIXON: Sure, thank you. Great question.

So basically for identifying a lot of our students we started our after school as a pilot program and we started the launch in 2020, the pandemic happened, but really was just focused on

kids who naturally dropped in and would ask the librarian for help and just assessing what that need is and just having the tutors on site as part of that, so it's just really knowing our... our staff in the branches knowing who needs help and promoting that service.

NICK BURON: You know not only that Gesille is correct and it's nice to see you again, but you know so like I said before, we have young people that self-select themselves to come to us, but we really have to go to them too and that's where you know the outreach to schools was really hurt, because you know we couldn't get into schools, because... because of that and that's really restarting now, but our outreach teams were very you know vital to you know get those mobile units out and get into the community, whether it's community centers, whether it's cultural centers, whether it's temporary housing to actually bring the library to them as well to reintroduce the library even during the pandemic and it was a little tricky at times of course when you can only have so many people on a mobile library at... at one time, but just to get the word out that the

library is still there for you and that we're there to assist.

LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah, I... I don't have much to add to all of those comments other than the emphasis that we placed as soon as the weather was permitted and using our outdoor spaces to gather people around in a way that was safe and socially distances and... and con... continued to keep people in the habit of visiting their local library.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you. And... and which branches or... or neighborhoods did all of you see the highest need in demand for learning support and... and how did you track this... this information in particular?

GESILLE DIXON: so I could speak for... for mainly for New York Public Library, the South Bronx neighborhoods were those that mostly needed extra support, because we were not seeing people utilizing normally. Pre-pandemic there was an influx of students coming into the library and that loss you know is... is quite deep and Harlem for some of our neighborhoods and the Port Richmond area in Staten Island.

TONY MARX: Nick, go ahead. Oh, you're...
Nick needs to be unmuted.

NICK BURON: I keep muting myself after I go, because I'm so used to that for the last two years.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: You... you can keep yourselves off of mute. Keep yourselves off mute.

NICK BURON: Yes, thank you, I will. I will not mute again.

TONY MARX: Just in time to be perfect for the last suit.

NICK BURON: My mother would say I need to mute myself more often, not less often.

You know we were able to identify, we did demographic you know we did demographics and you know we did wanna look at locations. We looked at LeFrak City, the area of LeFrak City, South Jamaica, Astoria, Long Island City, we... we... we really needed to get you know assistance out to Far Rockaway as well. You know these were areas that we traditionally have known that we wanted to you know look at you know in good times these are locations that need extra support and that you know we do try to get you know either additional programming or always make

sure that we have our after school pro... STACKS program there, but you know once... once we realized that you know there were you know that the digital divide that people still weren't getting their laptops from the DOE and we were hearing from teachers that kids were sharing their laptops with their siblings, you know this is where we at least wanted to get the hotspots out and... and then when we were able to get funding for laptops we wanted to start working on that as well. I will not mute.

LINDA JOHNSON: I would just add... and by the way Nick, I'm famous for speaking while muted at least once a day two years in, still doing it.

We you know had long identified which... which neighborhood libraries had deepest need that is something that's been going on well before the pandemic and just continue to follow the data and the... and the work that we had done pre-pandemic to continue to kind of emphasize where our support was.

TONY JOHNSON: Can I just add? You know look we... we obviously provide services across all neighborhoods, all demographics in... in our areas though we do... we don't target particular demographics, we certainly target particular

neighborhoods that need particular programs. One of the great powers of the library is we can't force anybody to come, so the numbers you're hearing are evidence of meeting real need, because otherwise people simply wouldn't come. We don't... because of privacy we're the last people left on the planet who protect privacy, so we... we can't... we don't sort of track individuals in that way, but we certainly track zip codes, etcetera. We... you know we do surveys, all that.

Lastly, let me just state the obvious, which is you know the great tragic story of America and of New York, which is we know where these neighborhoods are, because we've always known where these neighborhoods are, in New York in the United States the poorest neighborhoods are also the highest proportion of where BIPOC students and families are living and where the schools have failed most dramatically to provide the kind of opportunity or at least to keep the kids going on that line of opportunity. I mean it's you know, we know I mean the South Bronx comes up for us as the obvious first example, not surprisingly it's the poorest neighborhood Congressional District in the United

States of America, right? I mean the pattern is very clear, which is why we can clearly focus on addressing that pattern, I mean that's... I wish it were otherwise, but we certainly we see it, right?

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Right, right. Well, thank you for... for your answers. I do want to you know move on to... to see how libraries address the problem during this pandemic and I know many of you brought this up throughout your testimonies, but please describe the various ways in which learning was lost during the pandemic and how did this specifically affect BIPOC Youth and in ways are the libraries responding to this, especially when tackling remote learning?

TONY MARX: Gesille, you wanna get us started that's all right. Again, I mean Gesille is... i... I visit and I see the results, but Gesille's got the team and she's seeing it right... right now.

GESILLE DIXON: So... so you know pretty much we've addressed it by just spending time with the staff, just talking to some of the staff. The teams have sent out surveys just to understand what was happening and what's changed during that period of time, because we were closed and then it's like

reopening and what did we do, how do we serve, what... you know what needs to happen next? So pretty much you know looking at what that loss is talking to our school outreach teams, hearing from some of the local teachers and the schools as to how can the public libraries provide service, but are still in this virtual space and trying to act and you know keep the work going that we have been doing in person, so that's some ways that we have focused on just assessing the loss and figuring out post-pandemic, we're still in a pandemic, what do we need to do next?

NICK BURON: Adults were fantastic at moving to virtual programming. They... they re... they really embraced the virtual programming and you know our children's librarians you know worked with parents and caregivers to give programming to very young children and move our story time in a virtual environment and that was very successful. Quite honestly, it was much tougher for the middle school and high school to move them to a virtual environment in spite of as Kevin said, everyone thinks that the... that teenagers are so you know... you know adept at using technology, but it was really difficult to

bring them in and what we found is it was vital when we opened in person as to really make a concentrated effort to bring in, physically bring in middle school and high school kids again, because that's how they wanna interact with the public library. They want to interact with us you know in person and I think that what was... that was vital for us and it quite honestly it was learning as well. We thought that they might embrace that virtual environment as much as other age groups and it really wasn't the case and it... and I believe, we believe, it's that socialization that is so vital to what the library offers.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Right.

LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean I... I think that you know it... it's difficult to you know make a broad general statement about you know how it impacted you know a... a swath of... of our patrons. I think it varied by individuals, but for sure you know parents who had done yeoman's work trying to minimize the amount of screen time that their children had pre-pandemic and then moving them to an environment where their entire lives were lived online kind of pushed the you know traditional experience of needing and borrowing books and bringing the books back to

the library and... and then taking out more and the whole tactile experience, that kind of just became a... a... a relic of the past and that's a shame. We knew it was happening anyway, obviously like so many other things the pandemic just accelerated it, but I think parents who are actively involved in their children's literacy you know are struggling with the notion of how to get their kids back into the enjoyment, the sheer pleasure of reading and hopefully our summer reading program will... will help reinstitute that, but it's... it's sad.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Right, right. And... and what would... what would you say are some valuable lessons that you all learned from pivoting to alternative forms of support and resources during the pandemic that you can share and perhaps the city can build upon in their programmatic initiatives?

TONY MARX: I guess I'll... I'll just start by saying I think you know we learned that the digital is essentially, right? I mean we've sort of invested in it for a decade.

LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah.

TONY MARX: Or longer and suddenly it was everything, right? And that's a sa... and there's

things we can do that we can't do physically, but I think we also learned as Linda was just saying you know we're not cavemen, we don't all wanna sit at home alone in front of a screen, teens I think in particular, I mean that's why the teen centers are... are through the roof, but I... and... and also I think we learned again, we knew this, but we learned it and you know harder this time, which is even though the teens and the kids are you know digital natives, right? So you'd think that was as Nick was saying, they're not necessarily thinking of the library that way, they've got lots and lots of other platforms, we you know as much as we're doing you know we're sort of doing double what we used to be doing, but we are... I think the missing piece is sort of the outreach piece, the sort of you know has... has it been heard, which is how do we get out there and get the message out that it's cool, that different things are happening, that other kids are... you know and teens are hanging out and that the... this is the place you know etcetera and you know again, that's gonna be you know some combo of digital and on... and... and analog outreach, celebrity outreach, you know mass media outreach, social media outreach, whatever it is,

right? But we... I... we can't just... we can't just assume you know if you build it they will come, actually, no, you gotta also you know sort of invite them and make them feel like it's their space, right?

NICK BURON: You know and I... we did... we... the three library systems did a very good job moving to a virtual environment and then back to in person right now, what we've learned is we really have to do both and that takes a lot more resources. It... it sounds easy just to do a virtual programming, but that takes... there's a lot of components to doing virtual programming. At its height we were doing 70 a week, that takes a lot of back you know back... back office work to make sure that all the technology works well. Some programs are great in a virtual environment and some are absolutely not. The children's program that I just talked about, story time, we did it really well in a virtual environment, but that relationship between the librarians and children and their caregivers really happens best in person, but some programming for older you know adults were much better in a virtual environment ironically, because more people were able to attend even though, again, sometimes we think oh, the... you

know the older you are the less likely you are to use the technology and that was not true either, so it was a really great... great way for us to see that what we knew before, relationships are key and you know it's really the staff. This... a... a... a... a positive staff member can make a program with a bunch of middle school or high school kids and they are the key to this and that's why... and they're our best resource, is the staff that we work with.

GESILLE DIXON: Yeah, so I... I mean...

LINDA JOHNSON: I don't wanna... I don't wanna belabor the point, but the... I just wanna emphasize a couple things. One, both Nick and... and Tony have eluded to this, we learned that we needed to accelerate, and we did, all of us, you know the rate at which we were evolving into a digital enterprise and so that happened and it was terrific and... and so now we have this scenario where we are returning to the traditional bricks and mortar business, but also understanding deeply how important the digital component of what we do is and will continue to be and so we are essentially running two operations, which require more resources. It is much more expensive to do business the way we are now and

we need to figure that out. And... and it's true what Nick also says about the importance of staff and I would add the importance of place, that completely abandoning the more traditional model that libraries have been known for, for over 120 years doesn't work either, that what we do in each community has a benefit not only to the individuals who take advantage of the offerings, but to the community as whole that our place, our... our sort of roll is the glue in the community needs to be maintained in order to keep our communities healthy and the only way for us to do that is to keep what's happening in the branches, the programs that we offer, need to... need to stay relevant in order to keep people coming into that place and having all of the ancillary benefits that go with being in a physical space together with your neighbors.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And are the libraries planning to continue these technology services and programs even as students are going back to school in person?

LINDA JOHNSON: Of... absolutely. As I said we can't... we're... we're ne... we're never going back.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Right. But have you seen a increase or decrease in demand for services or has it stayed relatively the same?

GESILLE DIXON: At... at New York Public we've had a mix. We've had patrons reach out and request that we keep the virtual presence, but we recognize there are some communities that have not met us in that virtual space, so having in person program of course you know just gets everyone in who may not have access, but then it's thinking how do we do so, a quality program where you're serving an in person audience and allowing you know digitally someone to come in and have the same quality experience, 'cause it's quite difficult. We're learning that, that audience engagement is you know robust when it's live and it's in person verses someone tuning in live stream and I'll give a demonstration. If I'm giving a story time and the audience is this way and I'm reading to that group of children it's somewhat hard that you guys get ignored on the screen, right, because my focus is now in the room, so even if we have the right digital equipment it's always being mindful that staff are trained to

engage with that audience, right, virtually and in person.

NICK BURON: You know Gesille says it well and it's as Linda said, we're doing two operations now and we're in the process and it's not as easy as one meeting to figure out of what works best in each format, what works best you know virtually, what works best in person and quite honestly, what works best in a hybrid environment and that's what Gesille was saying if I... it seems easy just to start recording, but that's not it if you want to engage the virtual audience and so... and it will increase our program content that we can also draw from too that this is a process that's gonna... that takes more time, money and resources.

LINDA JOHNSON: The... the only thing I would add to all of this is it's not only... it's... it's not only about more, but there are some librarians who have very naturally become you know superb at offering virtual programs and others who are not as comfortable there and so it's not just a matter of you know finding ways to make more time for people to do both, but actually figuring out how to take advantage of our... our skillsets and not everybody's

good at everything and this has created kind of a you know, it's created an interesting situation where the people who are the frontline and weren't necessarily so great at the vis... on the virtual side you know were working at a different rate during the pandemic and those who were busy creating virtual content all the time and now as things are shifting you know the kind of sands are shifting under our feet again and... and this all is gonna take some time to... to work itself out.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And do the libraries have enough devices to meet the demands?

LINDA JOHNSON: I mean that's a... that's a matter of priority you know, this gets to how we... how we deploy our resources and whether we're spending money on... on tech or on people or on materi... you know hardcopy and material and so I think all of us are... are adjusting as we need to. We need... we need a general pot and... and the flexibility to spend it as each of our... as... as each of our systems need it.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: So would you say no?

LINDA JOHNSON: No, I would not say that the amount of hardware we have is an issue for us, I would not say that that was the case.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Okay.

LINDA JOHNSON: We're... we're okay. We have enough hardware and we can always... and we can always fix that if we don't.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Okay.

TONY MARX: Yeah, I mean we did work hard with the controller's office, so that more of technology could be capital eligible.

LINDA JOHNSON: Great, great point. Great point.

TONY MARX: But that meant we could address that in a systemic way that we would have in past.

LINDA JOHNSON: And... and by the way like for me... for me to say that we have enough of anything, especially to this group, we always need... we always need more, that is the mantra here. We have more, we can do more.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Right.

TONY MARX: Well, I wanna double that, yes, that's true, but again, I just wanna make the... the... the point, which is you know we... we've always been the library, the most visited civic institution in every neighborhood in town and then we became the

digital library and in our case aspirations to help that I think we're all agreed in a sort of global way, not just in a New York City way, so that's sort of doubling our task and let's remember the point of this... of this testimony of today's hearing, which is we understand we need to add additional resources as well as sort of covering our bases, but additional resources for BIPOC students, for you know neighborhoods in particular need, if you just think about the math what we're saying is we're sort of doing two and a half times what we used to do on basically the same budget, I mean it's with inflation, etcetera or not quite with inflation now I imagine, but you know I mean that's you know that's a challenge and you know that's not whinging, it's just the reality and we're doing it, right, but you know there... there are limits at some point, right?

NICK BURON: Yeah, and just to piggyback on that as well I mean we can get laptops for you know lots of laptops for our community you know without understanding that we have to maintain those and in three years they have to all be replaced all over again, it's the maintenance of the equipment and I'm gonna throw in here that it's the maintenance of

our facilities and you know I think it would be remiss of me if I didn't say that when we have non-capitally eligible repairs that we have to do in our places and we have to spend expense money on a boiler that take... that could take out a lot of laptops and hotspots that we otherwise would've bought, because we have to buy a boiler in order to not have a place close down for over six months just because we can't provide heat, so it really is all interconnected as well.

LINDA JOHNSON: Also just because we're always talking about what our patrons need and maybe we're like the you know cobbler whose kids don't have shoes, just as the pandemic hit we were replacing all of the tech you know at the back of the house for our staff and so we need to resume all of that. We need to make sure that our teams have the equipment, the hardware, the software that they need in order to do their work as well.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I... I do wanna pivot a little bit away from technology, thank you for answering those questions, but I also wanted to ask what outreach did the libraries do to ensure that the most impacted students such as low income students,

students with disabilities and English language learners had access to the libraries resources?

LINDA JOHNSON: So that... that is what we do. I mean we have outreach teams that are... have been doing this for years, it's part of our bread and butter and we continue to the extent that we weren't you know didn't have our hands tied to do that during the pandemic and we have... the... there... it's all anecdotal, but you know stories about librarians who you know picked up the phone and called patrons, especially like with older adults whose... you know were maybe shut in and... and there was already a phone relationship that had been established, but you know reaching out to children who you know were... or families with children who... who were sort of on shaky ground before the pandemic, that you know, we have a whole outreach team and we could spend an entire hearing talking about the work that that team does to make sure especially that marginalized and kind of vulnerable patrons are kept in the fold.

NICK BURON: WE had... we had American Sign Language story time in various... in various languages, because you know in... you know in Queens and in the rest of the city you can't really do something in

just... in just English and ask I had said earlier really the outreach to temporary housing when during the lockdown was you know when we were just able to get things rolling in terms of just a little bit of outreach, that was the first place we needed to go is temporary housing where families were... were living just to make that connection whether it's just you know giving them books, giving them you know packets of supplies, any craft, anything that would make that connection you know for it was a connection with the library, but really it was the vital connection of anything that was coming, because there wasn't much you know really interconnectivity, so...

LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah. Yeah, so...

NICK BURON: As Linda said, we... this is what we do though.

LINDA JOHNSON: All three of... all three systems work in the shelters, we work with parents and families that have somebody who's incarcerated, this whole notion of just sort of being in a... a... a building with four walls is really no longer the library model and so for example, when the pandemic hit we were all working on, at least in Brooklyn I sa... I should say, we were working hard on census

outreach, so we already people in the streets out there trying to get people into the library to make sure that Brooklyn was represented... represented appropriately in the census and that the... those folks continue to do that work even under the you know lockdown.

GESILLE DIXON: Yeah, for us we did a lot of grassroots outreach where we did you know neighborhood walks just getting out in the community, so that people see that you know we were back. We weren't fully open, you know we had limited service, but our staff spending time trying to reconnect and you know I lot of the businesses and the community based organizations had protocols in place, but we would do you know call just to reconnect and then show up and provide information about what services we were offering even if we were in a virtual space. Our school outreach teams just calling those school coordinators to you know remind like, "Yes, we're virtual, but here are resources that's available to you."

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Right.

TONY MARX: I'll just... I could just add that you know in addition to all the things that were

ra... ongoing and the special efforts I... I think that it's worth noting that you know we stepped up whenever we could and volunteered whenever we could to be testing sites, to be vaccination sites and again I mean that was a parallel important thing for us to do, but it was also important for us as a way to say to our communities, "We're here in whatever way you need us to be here and when the testing of the vaccines are over we're still here in all the other ways you need us to be." I mean...

LINDA JOHONSON: Oh, oh, I mean also here we are for the testing and the vaccine, you know everything we could... everything we could do. I mean in Brooklyn alone we've given I think almost 40,000 test kits...

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Wow.

LINDA JOHNSON: We've distributed.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Well, I wanna move to my last portion of... of questioning before hearing from my colleagues and I know that some of you have answered these throughout this... this entire hearing, but just for the record I would love to hear about plans for the future in terms of closing the learning gap, so the first question is, yeah, how do the

libraries plan to continue to close the learning gap as we recover from this pandemic?

LINDA JOHNSON: Well I mean again, that... that's our... that's our bread and butter. We are actually always in the process of helping school aged children keep up with their work. We... we're never better than when we're coordinated with schools, so the... what's happening in the library dovetails with the pedagogy that's in the local school and... and you know nothing like good teachers and principals working with great librarians...

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Right.

LINDA JOHNSON: To make that all come together and we'll continue to do that.

NICK BURON: And we want to...

LINDA JOHNSON: And... and that... that... you know that... that involves virtual, that involves on the ground, I mean that's just kind of infused in everything that we do.

NICK BURON: Well, you know while we want to expand the initiatives that we have you know we're going to do that with the resources that we have to you know to continue with high school and college readiness with you know with really providing digital

classes for teenagers with as Linda said, supporting them in their middle school, high school and into college years and that positive relationship that we have with young adult librarians who are very much focused on working with teenagers and serving as that bridge for them you know to be able to use the resources of the library, youth counselors that we have in many key areas as well. We're gonna do this, but you know with the needing funding we could do it at the level that's absolutely needed. For now we're doing it at the level that we can.

TONY MARX: Oh, I'll just say you know I think everything you've heard, we... we need to rebuild and we need to expand and you know we need to double down and that includes the after school programs, the summer learning is key including the book giveaways that... that we're talking about. I'll just say for me the teen center is you know what I... I wanna keep my eye on, which is can we increase to at least 20 low income neighborhoods and... and I simply say that, partly this is anecdotal and partly based on what Gesille and... and the experts tell me, which is you can just see that this a place where the teens are... they... they're so eager to come in and be together and

try different things and argue about things and you know use the studios and the maker spaces, all of that and then of course the programs to get them into colleges or in... onto careers or whatever combination makes sense for them. We are... that's what we need... we are keeping our eye on in terms of the substance of the response and it's simply a matter of the resources that we're gonna have to be able to do this as you know rebuild and expand as fast as... and as much as we can.

LINDA JOHNSON: But I think outreach is key and not to beat a dead horse, but the issue is that there's a lot of competition for teens and we can do great things once we have them engaged, but the trick is to be building spaces and offering programs that are attractive to teens and that beat out the not so positive things that we compete with.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: You know as many of you all know our students even in a progressive city like New York still lack a diverse education such as studying more about black history in schools and maybe LGBTQ history as well. How do the libraries work to close those gaps in our educational system?

TONY MARX: Well it... I... I mean our fundamental response is to make all that material available. I'm sure that it's available, I mean there are parts of the country where that's not the case purposefully where people are you know are blocking, banning books and you probably read you know that you know all three systems have done various things to try to unban books particularly for BIPOC students and LGBTQ issue, those are where the banning's are focused, so that's where the unbanning's need to be focused, but you know I mean this is... this as Linda says, this is very much our bread and butter. It has to be.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Right. And... and the last question that I have is... is for you, President Marx. You know the Schomburg Center for Research and Black Cultures, one of the New York public libraries, research libraries and serves as a repository for information on people of African descent worldwide, can you tell us more about resources for young people available through the Schomburg Center including the Junior Scholars Program?

TONY MARX: Sure, well sorry, the Junior Scholars Program has been going for a while now.

We've had support from the Mellon Foundation as well as the City Council for that program and other programs at the Schomburg. Look, as you said it is the preeminent national archive center for the study of African-American diaspora history. It's in Harlem, it's... you know it has amazing staff with a great new Director, Joy Bivens, first female director of the Schomburg, which is great as is she and yeah, I mean we're committed to the teen center, but also getting the collections out physically as well as digitally to folks. I mean you know we just acquire... we acquired the James Baldwin archive, we've got everything that everyone's gonna be excited about, because as Linda says we are competing for teens attention and we can't just sit here and sort of say, "Well, we're the library, they should come," we have to make it so exciting and so interesting and so unique that they want to come and we see that fully and the Schomburg is a great resource for us, though, it's not just the Schomburg, I wanna be clear, I mean the Schomburg is our... is our... is our headliner in this regard, but it's... the whole system needs to be doing this, the whole research library, the branches, all of it, the collections in every regard.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And... and one last question, how can the Council best support the libraries and serving young people in... in these programs particular like the Junior Scholars Program?

TONY MARX: Well I think targeted support is fabulous, but I think we all agree we need to ensure... if we spend our time backfilling and worrying about holes that are developing, because we don't have baseline funding then we cannot plan, we cannot build, we cannot sustain across the board. Yes, it's great when the... when then City Council partners with us, for instance with the Juniors Fellows Program or other you know other things that we have partnered with that have helped these particular communities, but you know if we are sitting around, to be honest as systems, or our staff worrying about you know an 8 million dollar hole we have to fill from last year and always having to do that every year, that does... that's not productive energy, I'll just be honest, right, or not a useful... not useful energy.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Listen, I... I definitely understand that. I gotta ask those questions, so that we have those on the record, so that when I'm

approaching my colleagues throughout this budget dance they know that too.

That concludes my... my questioning portion and I'll pass it on to... to you Brenda.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much, Chair and thank you to the libraries. So I will now call on Council Members in the order that they have raised their hand using the Zoom raised hand function.

Council Members, if you would like to ask a question and you have not yet used the Zoom raise hand function please do so now. Please keep your questions to five minutes. The Sergeant at Arms will keep a timer and will let you know when your time is up. You should begin once I call on your and the Sergeant has announced that you may begin.

So first, we will hear from Council Member Dinowitz followed by Council Member Joseph. Council Member Dinowitz, you may begin when ready.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you so much. I... I... I just have to say I love our libraries and it's so incredibly impressive what you do with such a... a... well inadequate budget. You know ev... like

in middle school I was one of those kids that would go hang out with my friends after school, go to library, we'd... I'd... I'd check out materials, they were usually VHS tapes and for my colleagues who don't know what a VHS is you can Google it, but I did those programs. I did the poetry writing, I did short story writing and as a father I brought my twins to... to Mozart and Scribble at story time and we're using the... the reading chart. It looks like Ms. Dixon's poster in the background actually, the... the one that we're reading.

GESILLE DIXON: Summer reading.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: The su... yeah, yeah, we play... we play a little game like each time you read a book you know? But look, I... like I know about the library, you know I went there, I take my kids there, they know it, we love it, we use it, but when I was a... as a high school special education teach in the Bronx like early in my career I remember I was chatting with some of students in one of my self-contained classes, I you know made some comment about going to the library and I found out a lot of them didn't have a library card, so I had to... after school we walked to the library together, so they can

get a card and they discovered in high school how amazing our libraries are and throughout my career I... I would discover similar stories when you know students didn't have broadband at home, so I would direct to the library just to find out... they didn't know where their local branch was. I... I remember at some point a school aid came by my classroom and handed me a stack of library cards for the kids and that was kind of the extent of... of the outreach done and I'm saying this to highlight the fact that you do incredible work and especially you know targeting BIPOC communities you're very thoughtful in your programming and you know there are gaps from Covid, but as Tony Marx said, these... these built upon already existing gaps.

I'm concerned and you've mentioned a number of times about the students who aren't engaged, my... my students. I'm concerned about those students who are typically left behind, students with disabilities for example.

I love that you did outreach to temporary housing, I think that was very creative and exactly what needed to be done, but as Nick Buron said, relationships are key. Our teachers, our school

faculty, they often have the relationships with students. I'm wondering what work... or ha... has the DOE reached out to the public library, NYPL, Queens, Brooklyn to really integrate your programming into the curriculum, into the culture of the school system not... so that it's not based on an individual teacher like me or an individual principal who you know happens to get library cards for kids and then have they provided any data that helps evaluate the... the effectiveness of the programming offered to the kids?

TONY MARX: So Council Member, I'll... I'll dive in. First, it's great to see you and yes, I think we agree, I think you've got six branches in your neighborhood doing you know amazing things. They all...

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: They're all great.

TONY MARX: Of course, all... all branches are great. I'll just say a... a shout out that Kingsbridge and Mosholu have two of our after school centers, so that... that program that we're so excited about and having made much about the teen centers as really a sort of fulcrum for this effort. I'm... I'm delighted that the Van Cortlandt Library will have a

teen center opening this summer, so that's terrific and of course that's a new... brand new much improved facility.

LINDA JOHNSON: You can't believe what I'm doing here.

TONY MARX: Hi Linda, we can hear you.

LINDA JOHNSON: Hi guys.

TONY MARX: And you know lastly, I'll just say the data, you know we can get more data and Gesille may have some, but I'll just... I... I need to say you know one of our issues you know you can't do any of this, the outreach, all the programs, etcetera without the staffing and you know it's hard to hire these days, we all know that, but part of why it's hard to hire is you know we don't have the funding for the positions, people...

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I can just pause you for sec, because I... I totally understand that and appreciate that, which is why I'm interested more in I... I... I... the DOE budget is like 200 times your... 250 times your budget, right, so that's why I'm... I'm asking kind of what outreach the DOE has done to you and kind of how... how... if they've come to the table offering to really integrate what you're already

doing into the... in... into what they're doing in the classroom and to the curriculum and to the culture, so that we can really get the marginalized students you know. I'm talking about the students with disabilities, I'm talking about students who didn't grow up like I did, whose parents may not have taken them to the library.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: That's... that... that was really more the direction of my question.

NICK BURON: I have a really good relationship with my library, NYC, which is a DOE centered program that for us gets to 90 schools, middle schools and high schools and so you know that's been a way for our staff to be able to go into the schools and be able to you know continue relationships more than just you know the one on one that you were talking about earlier, which used to be the more traditional invite your local librarian just to come to your local school, so this is a little bit more centered and if it's 90 for us, I know it's... it's more throughout the system and it's worth mentioning that dur... even during the pandemic we had a South Jamaica Reads Initiative that worked with the

middle schools in the South Jamaica area where it was a combination of the DOE, the library and you know even Scholastic got involved to really be able to get some books into their hands, so it... it... it takes a lot to get you know three together, three groups together, but... and I think that's it. I think quite honestly these are the... the bigger initiatives that we're doing more than just what you're talking, but we're always looking you know to try to work with the DOE on bigger initiatives.

TONY MARX: I'll just say you know as... as Nick said, my libraries, we're now I think the three systems are effective the circulating libraries for half the public schools, that was simply not the case, which was you know crazy before we cooperated in that way. Our after school programs obviously in coordination with the DOE, Gesille and her teams are talking to the DOE all the time. Let me just say you know the... the center for educators and students is where we're gonna focus this in, particularly for the research library, so it's... that's additional resources. Lastly, you know with all... you know we all see the difficulties that the DOE has had to work under and the general challenges that they have to

work under, you know they're big, they got a lot going on, they're not the easiest partner to sort of you know make deals that work with for lots of reasons, not for lack of good intentions on either side, but I think it's increasingly obvious that these need to be coordinated as... as... and that's what we've been doing and trying to do.

COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Right, and I know my time's up, but I just wanna thank you all, especially for the work you're doing for our youth and... and... and our, especially our older adults and really for everyone. Libraries are for everyone, incredible resource. I wanna... I wanna thank you for all... all of the work you're doing with... with not enough resources, which the truth.

COMMITTEE COUSEL: Thank you so much Council Member. We'll next go to the next Council Member in the queue, which will be Council Member Joseph followed by Council Member Hanif.

Council Member Joseph, you may begin when the Sergeant calls the clock. Thank you.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Good morning, good morning, Chair Ossé. Thank you so much for having this wonderful hearing.

Public library first and... first and foremost as a former educator, let me say thank you to you. We've always been a partner, especially Flatbush, I wanna shout out to Flatbush, Linden Boulevard..

LINDA JOHNSON: Yes, I know... I know you're using it regularly and we love that.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Correct, and we've always had a partnership in terms of supporting the immigrant community. At one point you were a hub for us creating ID NYC for our adult programming, so thank you for that and that was very important to... to us and also partnering up with our schools to bring in books drop off. At one point you were doing library cards without the students having to leave to go to the library, so the library came to us, so that I thank you so much.

My question during the pandemic I know this uprooted everyone's life, but I have particular vulnerable community that I serve near and dear to my heart. My ENL students were left behind by every

major institution I can state and... and the DOE says that we have about 145,000 of them and they were left behind. I wanna know how was the library able to support them during the pandemic and then moving forward how do we plan to support them in the future? As well, also... also with their parents as well, because immigrant children come with immigrant parents, so how can we work together to support our ENL students and also our... our parents? Anybody?

LINDA JOHNSON: Broad... broad question. So you know we have a broad network of language programs for people who are learning English as a second language. It's pervasive throughout the whole spectrum of services that we offer from you know, well from birth to you know, we... life-long learning as we say and immigrants as well as... as people who need additional language skills who are perhaps not as recent to this country, but we offer classes, both drop in and things that can be registered for and we're gonna continue to do that. We've tried to convert these to virtual programs as well. We know that people who are most vulnerable can't take advantage of those, so I... I think that especially as the weather warms up we'll be able to do more outside

and as you may know you know we've really made a robust push into outside programming and building spaces outdoors, so that people feel comfortable coming back. I think it's... it's persistence and making sure that we're offering these classes in as many languages as there is demand and we do it not only with our great library staff, but also with volunteers.

NICK BURON: And just piggyback on that even outside of Brooklyn where... where Linda's talking about, in Queens we were doing bilingual story times and... and that's the good thing about the virtual environment is that anyone was able to come from anywhere and so you know even though we might've done things in one community really it was you know able to be open. The ESOL classes that we were doing virtually kind of surprised us that so many people were taking advantage of it. Here again, we were making assumptions that you know that there were groups of people that some were stronger than others in the technology field and yet you know our immigrant community was pretty good at coming to our virtual classes. We were doing bilingual home health aide series classes as well as well as bilingual tech

classes and so you know we've always... all three library systems have been pretty good at dealing with you know more than just English... English classes and that actually translated for us at Queens into a pretty good virtual environment and now we're back and yet this is one of the questions about continue virtual bilingual or even other...

LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah.

NICK BURON: Other languages as well.

LINDA JOHNSON: Also the virtual programs attracted huge numbers of people that we otherwise wouldn't be able reach. There's a... there's... there are all kind of anecdotes about story times in different languages that had you know 100 times the number of people participating than you would ordinarily see on a typical morning in a... in a branch.

NICK BURON: And virtual environment means that we are also able to do this outside of our regular hours and so sometimes that's not very convenient for you know hard working people in our communities to also go to classes and so you know by being able to provide those classes sometimes it's at off times than we would traditionally do those classes in... you know in regular library hours really

opened it up further for people to be able to take advantage of as well.

TONY MARX: Again, I...

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Just one last thing, as you may know there's about 1.3 million adult learners in this New York City that are immigrants, how are you helping them in terms of their digital divide? 'Cause I know that was a... a area, which they also faced a lot of challenges as well.

TONY MARX: We're... we're proud to you know always have been...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

TONY MARX: An option for the immigrant community, we're the place that trusts, everyone feels respected, no paper questions, no privacy, it's why we could do you know the census, etcetera you know and we... we think that is first and foremost and it's why we have to do the English language programs, it's why we're the... not first and foremost, but it's a... it's a core responsibility and it's why for instance we have the largest English language... English language programs in the city outside of the public schools in CUNY, why everything we do for

free, why we focus on getting more different language material into the collections, hiring more amazing staff who... who have these languages, using technology and as my colleagues said, delighted when we find... we were surprised to find people staying with us digitally, because we're... they... they need us, that's a good sign, but you know we... you know again, it's a budget constraint. I mean there's only so much time in the day, we got virtual and we've got you know people... there are people who say, "No, it only works for me in person," and it... we don't wanna... breaks our heart to think we can't deal with that and we get stretched, which is why we're here talking about this.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Got it. Thank you so much Chair Ossé, thank you so much public libraries for all that you do.

LINDA JOHNSON: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUSEL: Thank you so Council Member. We will now move to Council Member Hanif for questions.

You may begin when the Sergeant calls the clock.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you so much, good afternoon and hello to Chair Ossé. Big fan of libraries and what an honor to be able to really look after the libraries. I grew up attending in my district, particularly Borough Park and Windsor Terrace, so thank you so much for your collaboration and coordination and just the continued work that needs to be done, especially in the south part of my district.

I've been really inspired to see the outdoor library, which is outside of my district and Yeager's district at the Kensington Library. I was curious to know if there is additional funding that continue to expand the outdoor library program and then in addition to that I'm looking to expand the open streets programming in my district on the streets adjacent to libraries. I wanna know the feasibility of that and if there's excitement or enthusiasm, but would wanna use these streets to gather families and would be a supporter to coordinate programming. You could count on my office to... to be a... a strong collaborator. I'm just really appreciative of... of the libraries and for continuing to be stalwarts of... of learning and enjoyment, so

would love to hear a little bit more about the outdoor programming and what we can do as Council Members to push those efforts.

LINDA JOHNSON: Well, first of all, thank you so much for your support and I know you have a long tradition of working closely with us in your previous life as well, so much appreciated.

Yes, the outdoor piece is central to our... has been central to the delivery of service over the past two years and we're excited to get... to be at that moment in... in the year where we're reopening those spaces once again, including Kensington. We borrowed the model initially from the restaurant industry, took a look at what was happening and said, "How can we do this?" and obviously the easiest locations were the ones that land that didn't require DOT permits, but once we... once we sort of hit all of the easy low hanging fruit we did of course partner with the DOT and would be happy to continue to do that. We're always looking for new opportunities and I think the best thing to would be to go... take this offline and make sure that my office is working with you to figure out if there's specific areas where

you're interested that we haven't already planned or that we're you know in the process of planning.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Yeah, that'd be really exciting and I've been listening in on your testimonies and your remarks to the questions asked in... in the past that you know we... the libraries have the onus of getting young people into them and I think our open streets are a big factor and I'd love to be a partner in just thinking about how you could get more young people involved and how we get immigrant families really engaged, how we get more books in other languages. I'm really excited to be doing this event for EID with the Brooklyn Children's Museum where I'll be reading a... a children's book written by a Muslim woman author. I mean there's just so many...

LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So much happening right now.

LINDA JOHNSON: So we're moving... we're...

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Yeah.

LINDA JOHNSON: We're moving our library into the Brooklyn Children's Museum, which will happen later this year.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Excellent.

LINDA JOHNSON: And that's got outdoor space planned already. I think there are 13 new sites located for this coming season with outdoor space and I'm just getting a text that says that I think we're scheduled to meet with you this Friday, so...

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: That's right.

LINDA JOHNSON: We'll be sure that this is on the agenda.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I'm excited and looking forward to that. Well, thank you so much and looking forward to continuing to work together and really bring in the outdoor learning component, outdoor space component to our work in the... in my district in particular.

LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah, I think Borough Park in particular is one of the new one's that's coming online.

TONY MARX: I think we're all doing this across the system. We're going from seven to 17 outdoor locations and the... the Niarchos Library here is the only outdoor public terrace for free in Manhattan and you know we've now... we're now adding one at Lincoln Center for the Library for Performing

Arts, so that the... the students that are in the public high schools across the street no longer feel like Lincoln Center is not welcoming to them. We wanna get them into Lincoln Center and into LPA as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Yeah, that's great. I just wanna see more in the outer boroughs. I know Manhattan gets prioritized and the folks out here...

TONY MARX: I get it, I to... and we...

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Say that... say that I again.

TONY MARX: No, I totally get it, which is why we're doing the 17 other locations and looking for outdoor space or creating outdoor space in the Bronx, Harlem, whatever.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Perfect.

TONY MARX: Interesting to me though, that even here in midtown Manhattan until we open the Niarchos outdoor space there was no...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

TONY MARX: Public outdoor space for free in New York even in the fancy neighborhoods, right? Though it isn't fancy folks who are using our libraries even here at the center in majority.

NICK BURON: Talking from an outer borough over here next to Brooklyn you know like all the three systems, we really enjoy partnering with local street fairs, getting out there, especially in the summer time whether it's setting up tables, whether it's bringing our big mobile units out to participate to you know we don't just go and set up a table, we actually do programming while we're out there. You know we... we don't believe in being passive per se. We believe if we're gonna be somewhere we're not just gonna sit the table, we're actually gonna do things there, parades that we like doing whether we're the participants as staff to participate as a form of outreach or encouraging parades and you know giving out book distribution and we also have you know plans you know as Tony said and Linda said you know increasing our footprint outside the physical walls of the library to make outdoor seating, that was something that we all learned that was a... a good thing to do and we are all planning on those expansions.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I'm really excited about that.

TONY MARX: Sorry.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: All right, thank... thank you so much to the libraries and thank you Council Members. I don't see any other hands raised. I'm just doing one last check.

TONY MARX: Can I just say, 'cause I made a mistake? Joy Bivens, who's amazing as the Director of the Schomburg, is not the first woman director the Schomburg. Jeanne Black of course was that until the 1980's, so I apologize.

LINDA JOHNSON: Thank you, so.. thank you all so much for your time and attention. Really deeply appreciated.

NICK BURON: Absolutely, thank you very much for your past and continued and future support.

TONY MARX: Thank you all, let's get this done.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: All right, thank... thank you so much to the libraries and thank you everyone today.

So this concludes the libraries testimony and the administration of libraries testimony portion of this hearing. So normally we would turn to public testimony, however, we do not have any registrations

from the public today, so we will do one check now for anyone that we have missed, but this will otherwise conclude the end of all testimony on the testimony portion of this hearing.

So for the record if we have inadvertently missed anyone that has registered to testify today if you have not been called, please use the Zoom raise hand function and you will be called in the order that your hand has been raised, so we will wait one moment. We're not seeing any hands, so seeing none just one moment, I'm just gonna wait for people. Yep, I'm seeing... seeing none, I will now turn it back to Chair Ossé for closing remarks. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you so much, Brenda and thank you to the representatives of our libraries who testified today, Brooklyn Public President Linda Johnson, New York Public Library President Tony Marx and Queens Public Library Chief Librarian Nick Buron, New York Public Library Vice President Gesille Dixons and Brooklyn Public Library Coordinator Kevin Kelley. I thank all of you for your service to our city and our communities, especially during Covid and I thank you for your advocacy for the libraries today and beyond.

I would like to thank my colleagues who joined us today for this important hearing today as a Chair of Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations it is important to me that our libraries are fully funded to ensure that there is enough staff and resources. It is important that our libraries continue to provide these services to our communities, especially our neighbors who need them most.

Thank you for joining us today and this hearing is now adjourned [GAVEL].

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date May 20, 2022