

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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Thursday, December 8, 2022

Start: 1:17 p.m.

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HELD AT: 250 BROADWAY, COMMITTEE ROOM,
14TH FLOOR

B E F O R E: Chi A. Ossé, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Eric Dinowitz
Amanda Farías
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)

Linda Johnson
President and CEO
Brooklyn Public Library

Anthony Marx
President
New York Public Library

Nick Buron
Chief Librarian and Senior Vice President
Queens Public Library

1 COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES, AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

3

2 Good afternoon everyone. I'm city Councilmember
3 Chi Ossé, Chair on the Committee on Cultural Affairs,
4 Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations.
5 Welcome to today's oversight hearing on equity and
6 civic engagement and the role of libraries. At this
7 hearing, the committee will also be hearing several
8 pieces of legislation which are unrelated to this
9 oversight topic but are also important.

10 Resolution number 285, sponsored by Councilmember
11 Charles Barron, calling upon the United States
12 Congress and President to end the Cuban embargo and
13 Cuban travel ban, Resolution number 387, sponsored by
14 Deputy Speaker Dianne Ayala, calling on the US
15 Congress to repeal the Merchant Marine Act of 1920,
16 commonly known as the Jones Act. And finally
17 Resolution number 392. Co-sponsored by
18 Councilmembers Tiffany Cabán, and Alexa Avilés,
19 supporting a democratically governed public entity
20 that will provide reliable and affordable electrical
21 power to the people of Puerto Rico, and supporting
22 the cancellation of the contracts with Luma energy.

23 Currently, none of my colleagues are in the room
24 right now, but we will go back to potentially hearing

25

1
2 statements from Councilmember Cabán and Councilmember
3 Barron about their resolutions.

4 Let me start our oversight hearing on equity,
5 civic engagement in the role of libraries by invoking
6 the words of one of our library administrators, which
7 were shared during a call with council staff over the
8 past several weeks, and which get at the heart of why
9 we're here today.

10 "Libraries are for everyone. Libraries are safe
11 for everyone. And that's why when the city rolls out
12 a new program, it looks to the libraries, because
13 people are comfortable going into a library. The two
14 libraries are in the role they play. That role --
15 supporting equity in New York City, and promoting
16 civic engagement among all of our residents -- cannot
17 be more fundamental and important to the way our city
18 functions and who we are as New Yorkers. Libraries
19 are one of the most democratic and accessible
20 institutions in the city. There is no charge to
21 enter a library. And given that the city's three
22 library systems operate in 220 locations across the
23 five boroughs, offering free and open access to
24 books, periodicals, electronic resources, and non-
25 print materials, it is amazing but perhaps not

1 surprising that there is a library within 30 minutes
2 of any New Yorker's home.

3
4 Additionally, libraries set an example and
5 accessibility. The three library systems maintain
6 robust and diverse collections in multiple languages
7 and provide access to computers, wireless internet
8 and other technology at no cost to library patrons,
9 thus serving as a critical resource for low-income
10 and non-English-speaking households. They also
11 promote equitable access to mobile technology by
12 providing widespread Wi Fi access, and by lending
13 tablets and laptops to patrons free of charge.

14 Libraries are also reliable in a model of
15 resiliency. When the COVID 19 pandemic force all of
16 New York City's library branches to close their doors
17 in the community in March of 2020, the three library
18 systems continue to serve patrons by moving their
19 services online, with each systems witnessing
20 immediate, unprecedented exponential increases, and
21 the number of New Yorkers accessing virtual library
22 resources and services.

23 These resources bridge the gap for many New
24 Yorkers during the pandemic by serving our most
25 underserved neighborhoods, especially by providing

1 resources to elementary and secondary students,
2 including free after-school homework help,
3 recreational programming, access to technology
4 including lending hotspots to students, virtual
5 summer reading camp, and summer reading kits in
6 English and Spanish, and online on the phone story-
7 time for kids in English, Spanish, and Mandarin.
8

9 The library systems also bridge the gap for
10 adults by offering individualized job support
11 services, English classes for Speakers of Other
12 Languages, voting-related virtual discussions, and
13 election reading lists and citizenship classes.

14 The very definition of equity is in the
15 inscription above the entrance to Brooklyn Central
16 Library's main branch which states that BPL "offers
17 to all the people perpetual and free access to
18 knowledge and the thought of all the ages." Today
19 our libraries faithfully serve every neighborhood and
20 every population in our city, including teens, older
21 adults, immigrants and asylum seekers, incarcerated
22 and formerly incarcerated individuals, veterans and
23 LGBTQIA plus constituents. They host countless
24 citizen groups at their facilities, participatory
25 budgeting events, voter registration drives, and

1
2 passport services and IDNYC offices. They facilitate
3 involvement in the democratic process and ensure that
4 every New Yorker counts as we witnessed in the city
5 census efforts.

6 I'm eager to learn more about ways in which the
7 city's 3 library systems serve and support the
8 broader New York City community and for us to reflect
9 together on how the city council can continue to
10 support their efforts.

11 Finally, I want to understand how our libraries
12 and our civic engagement and equity work will be
13 affected by the administration's program to eliminate
14 the GAP or the PEGS.

15 Before I move on, I want to acknowledge my
16 colleagues on the committee who are present:
17 Councilmember Cabán, who is remote, Councilmember
18 Hudson, who is also remote, Councilmember Dinowitz,
19 Councilmember Farias, and Councilmember Ung.

20 I would also like to thank my staff and the
21 committee staff for their work in preparing today's
22 hearing, Naomi Hopkins, my chief of staff,
23 Mayvutrapan Batana, my policy and budget director
24 Brenda McKinney, the committee's senior Legislative
25 Counsel, Regina Paul, the committee's Legislative

2 Policy Analyst, and Sandra Gray, the committee's
3 Financial Analyst.

4 Finally, I would like to address some
5 housekeeping items before we begin with the
6 administration's testimony.

7 First, as a reminder, today is an in-person
8 hearing of the option of virtual testimony for the
9 public. The committee will be accepting
10 registrations for testimony throughout the hearing.
11 Anyone who is attending in person and who wishes to
12 testify in person should see the sergeant arms to
13 fill out a witness slip even if you are registered or
14 registered online in advance.

15 As usual, we will begin today's hearing with
16 testimony from the three library systems followed by
17 Councilmember questions and answers and then move to
18 public testimony. We will limit Councilmember
19 questions and answers including comments to five
20 minutes. During the public testimony portion of the
21 hearing, witnesses from the public will be limited to
22 two minutes. As a reminder to all our witnesses,
23 please state your name prior to your testimony for
24 the record. The committee will also be accepting
25 written testimony for up to 72 hours after the

1 hearing. And now since we do not need to swear in
2 today's witnesses...

3
4 Okay, I also want to acknowledge Councilmember
5 Farrah Louis. And I do want to pass the torch to my
6 colleague, Councilmember Cabán, who will share
7 remarks on her resolution.

8 COUNCILMEMBER CABÁN: Thank you very, very much.
9 Chair. Good afternoon. My name is Councilmember
10 Cabán. My pronouns are she/her, and I want to start
11 by thanking everyone for joining and again, thank you
12 Chair Ossé for holding this important hearing.

13 Excuse me. Resolution 392, which is on the
14 agenda today calls for an immediate end to the
15 contract with Luma energy that has imposed unbearable
16 and unacceptable conditions for the people of Puerto
17 Rico. This Reso joins the voice of Puerto Rico's own
18 House of Representatives, which passed a resolution
19 earlier this year calling for the termination of
20 Lumas... Luma energy's temporary contract.

21 In spite of seven rate hikes since June 2021,
22 under Luma energy longer and more frequent power
23 outages have become the standard, not the exception.
24 And as we all know, hurricanes will only increase in
25 intensity... intensity and frequency as our climate

1 continues to change. It is in this context as well
2 as the cultural context of outside occupation and
3 colonization that a public electrical utility
4 governed by a democratically elected Board of Puerto
5 Ricans themselves, is essential to the well-being of
6 the island. Thank you, Regina Paul from the Ledge
7 Division and my legislative director, Mahdray Shukla,
8 for your work in drafting this important resolution.
9 Thanks.

10
11 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, Councilmember
12 Cabán. I hope you feel better. Let's dive into the
13 questions, shall we? We'll start with you, President
14 Johnson. What is your perspective on the roles of
15 library as it relates to equity and civic engagement?
16 And why does this matter?

17 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Good afternoon. Thank you
18 Chair Ossé. Thank you for quoting those wonderful
19 remarks from the facade of the central library. All
20 of us who walk into that building on a daily basis,
21 get to read those comments, and it definitely drives
22 the work that we do. I'm Linda Johnson. I'm
23 president and CEO of the Brooklyn Public Library.
24 And I would like to thank you and Speaker Adams and
25 committee members for this opportunity to testify.

1
2 And thank you as well to our Brooklyn delegation and
3 the entire city council for your efforts to ensure
4 that our branches remain safe and inclusive spaces
5 for all.

6 Five years ago as a response to former President
7 Trump's Muslim ban, the executive order prohibiting
8 citizens of the seven... seven mostly Muslim
9 countries from visiting the United States, Brooklyn
10 Public Libraries Bay Ridge branch, put a sign out on
11 the door that read "You Are Welcome Here. You are
12 loved." With racist and anti-immigration rhetoric on
13 the rise, Brooklyn Public Library adopted this as our
14 unofficial slogan across our 62 locations and our 100
15 outreach sites. We created an Everyone Is Welcome
16 Here campaign in 12 languages, and launched a
17 multilingual and cultural series to show patrons that
18 the library is for everyone, and that we mean it. To
19 further our commitment to inclusion, we focused on
20 programming and policy changes that open doors,
21 particularly for underserved communities. Along with
22 our colleagues at the New York Public Library and
23 queens Public Library, we eliminated late fines for
24 overdue books, removing one of the biggest barriers
25 for low income households. We also expanded our

1 language offerings. Today, patrons can access our
2 library materials in over 125 languages, and library
3 services in about 200 languages through translation
4 devices and language line, a live phone based
5 interpretation service. Just this week, we kicked
6 off the month long heritage ambassador program, which
7 brings folk and traditional artists, library staff,
8 and communities together through storytelling and
9 relationship building. Throughout December, we will
10 host several in-person and virtual events featuring
11 Korean folklore, indigenous art, Nigerian and
12 Trinidadian textiles, steel pan and Calypso music,
13 Haitian storytelling and more.

14
15 Earlier this year, we released the latest version
16 of our strategic plan: Finding Level Ground. It's a
17 plan that builds on our commitment to diversity,
18 equity and community participation with objectives
19 developed... with... with objectives developed the
20 pan during the pandemic, an intense period of growth
21 and learning. The planning process, which began in
22 spring of 2021 included a series of listening
23 sessions that helped us identify the following four
24 strategic priorities for the next two years.

1
2 First is Community Connections. After more than
3 two years of pandemic-related service disruptions and
4 physical closures, reestablishing neighborhood
5 relationships and strengthening in person programming
6 is a top priority. We know the effects of COVID-19
7 pandemic will be felt in Brooklyn for years to come,
8 as residents continue to grapple with evolving public
9 health threats, learning loss among school children,
10 and increasing economic uncertainty.

11 While we successfully transition to digital
12 services, making historic investments in our
13 electronic books and resources during the pandemic,
14 we face a particular challenge now, balancing in-
15 person and virtual offerings. Brooklyn Public
16 Library strives to offer the innovative and cutting
17 edge programming that we are known for providing it
18 all in the ways the public has come to expect.

19 Our second strategic priority is digital
20 inclusion. Public libraries have been leading
21 advocates for digital inclusion and equity. In
22 Brooklyn, this movement is more important than ever.
23 Nearly 30% of Brooklynites lack a home broadband
24 connection, with a much higher rate in neighborhoods
25 like East New York, where the number soars to 50%.

1
2 During pandemic closures, many families were
3 completely cut off from critical digital resources,
4 further exacerbating disparities we had been working
5 to overcome. In order to increase Internet access
6 during the pandemic, we launched the Brooklyn Reach
7 Project, extending our Wi Fi signal outside of our
8 branch buildings 300 feet in all directions 24 hours
9 a day. And because digital equity is an economic
10 issue, we are helping community members access low-
11 cost Internet services. This fall, we launched
12 Digital Navigators, a program that builds awareness
13 around the FCCs affordable connectivity program, and
14 provides one-on-one support to interested patrons,
15 including... including those who speak languages
16 other than English.

17 At the same time, BPL will continue to serve as
18 the hub for internet-based resources. We are
19 investing in new tools and spaces for digital
20 learning, including new teen tech... a new teen Tech
21 Center in Crown Heights Library, a tech-mobile to
22 help us better-reach underserved communities, and
23 expanded laptop and hotspot lending, especially for
24 our adult learning and justice initiatives.

1
2 Our third strategic priority is to continue
3 building a culture of anti-racism and anti-bias in
4 all Brooklyn Public Library locations and
5 neighborhoods. Libraries and librarians are among
6 the most trusted resources within our society,
7 offering spaces where everyone is welcome to pursue
8 their interests and dream. For young people,
9 librarians are often among the most dependable adults
10 in their lives, caring role models they can turn to
11 for guidance for almost anything, from helping with
12 schoolwork and extracurricular interests to sharing
13 the excitement and struggles that accompany coming of
14 age.

15 In our incredibly diverse borough, it is
16 essential for children and youth to have librarians
17 whose backgrounds they share, and for library staff
18 to represent and reflect the communities they serve.
19 But nationally, the field of librarianship is
20 remarkably homogeneous. 84% of American librarians
21 are white. While BPS librarians are already
22 significantly more diverse than the national average,
23 we are determined to better represent Brooklyn.

24 Towards this goal, we... we launched pathways to
25 leadership. The program offers scholarships for

1
2 master's degrees in Library and Information Services
3 for existing non-librarian staff from historically
4 underrepresented groups, thus building a more diverse
5 pool of library leaders. We currently have 11
6 pathway scholars representing a range of departments
7 and experience levels within the Brooklyn Public
8 Library system. Some are native New Yorkers, while
9 others hail from more distant places. For all
10 pathway scholars BPL has been central to their lives.

11 In addition to launching the Pathways Program,
12 Brooklyn Public Library hosted a systemwide
13 conversation titled "Real Talk: Race, Truth and
14 Transformation", and formed an internal Diversity
15 Equity and Inclusion Council and a board committee.
16 Over the past two years, these committees have
17 examined internal and external policies at the
18 library, and held remarkable programs for both staff
19 and the general public.

20 And finally, our fourth strategic priority is
21 supporting our staff. It's critical that all...
22 it's... which is critical to all of our goals and
23 objectives. To nurture the vibrant community-based
24 nature of our library system, we must make sure that
25 our staff has the tools training and support they

1 need to thrive. In addition to professional
2 advancement opportunities and mentorship, we found
3 that staff also benefit from increased connections
4 throughout the system. We are committed to creating
5 opportunities for staff to care for and learn from
6 each other across branches and across departments.

7
8 Brooklyn Public Library's outreach services work
9 is an integral part of addressing our strategic
10 priorities and overarching goals of inclusion inside
11 and outside our branches, serving immigrants, older
12 adults, people experiencing homelessness, families
13 affected by the justice system, and veterans: We are
14 providing essential services that contribute to
15 healthier, more equitable communities throughout the
16 borough. Many of our patrons are unable to access
17 services in our branch locations for a variety of
18 reasons. Brooklyn Public Library's skilled outreach
19 staff provide a vital conduit for information tools
20 and resources for those who need it most. For
21 example, our bookmobiles have traveled more than 2000
22 miles this year, participating in nearly 300 outings
23 from block parties to community outreach events. You
24 may have seen one taking Jimmy Kimmel for a ride on
25 his show this past September, and in the coming weeks

1
2 they will be on the road visiting shelters to share
3 resources with recently arrived asylum seekers
4 rerouted here from Texas and Florida.

5 Outreach Services are especially critical for
6 those who have immigrated from other countries. We
7 provide multilingual programs including citizenship
8 classes, English classes, seminars for immigrant
9 professionals and entrepreneurs, and legal support
10 from accredited immigration staff and attorneys.

11 For families separated by incarceration, the
12 library fills an often-overlooked gap in support. We
13 provide video visitation, jail-based library services
14 in New York City Department of Correction facilities,
15 as well as programs for people when they return home.

16 Our outreach also includes health and wellness
17 programs, programming to improve the overall well-
18 being of Brooklynites, a service more vital than ever
19 over the last two years. As you know, we've
20 partnered closely with the city to offer a variety of
21 services during the pandemic, and are currently
22 distributing thousands of free COVID tests... test
23 kits at all of our locations. Our older adult
24 patrons also benefit from outreach and special
25 programming. The technic... the technology for all

1 initiative includes workshops and personalized tech
2 support sessions for 1100 seniors, and we offer art
3 classes and musical performances, books to go, and
4 books by mail service that delivers to 300 older
5 adults who are confined to their homes.
6

7 We recently wrapped up our third series of senior
8 debate in collaboration with the Association for
9 senior debate. In this 10-session series library
10 staff and debate experts taught debate structure,
11 formed teams and instructed participants in preparing
12 to debate both the affirmative and negative sides of
13 a resolution. There were several weeks of workshops
14 and practice sessions before two weeks of debates
15 leading to the championship tournament on November
16 15. This was a great opportunity for older adult
17 patrons to learn a new skill, to engage in civil
18 discourse, and to come together to the library to
19 build new relationships.

20 Programs like Senior Debate also connect our deep
21 and active commitment to civic engagement. If you
22 fully... if you... if you are to fully represent the
23 communities we serve, we must provide a platform for
24 our patrons to participate in all levels of civil
25 society. By hosting polling sites every election day

1 and providing voter information and resources, we are
2 contributing to fair elections and informed... and an
3 informed electorate. By promoting our books on
4 banned programming for teens, we are protecting
5 intellectual freedom, assuring access to information,
6 and encouraging independent thought among young
7 people. By hosting government partners in our
8 branches to provide constituent services, we advocate
9 for patrons and... and facilitate connections with
10 elected officials, and city agencies. And by
11 attending community board meetings across the borough
12 and hosting participatory budgeting sessions in our
13 branches, we ensure inclusion, community ownership,
14 and long term investment in the city. By investing
15 in comprehensive community engagement sessions when
16 we renovate our branch libraries, we are creating
17 stronger connections to... and building responsive
18 inspiring new spaces. And when we take stakeholders
19 in our initial decision making, we help nurture
20 broader civic engagement and leadership.

21 At a time when so many city residents feel
22 disenfranchised and forgotten, it is more important
23 than ever, to create inclusive, welcoming and
24 functional spaces. I recently created Civic Commons
25

1 at Central Library with its own entrance on Flatbush
2 Avenue. It is a dedicated hub for civic
3 organizations and services. It houses the passport
4 services center, the IDNYC office, a computer center,
5 and a community partner office where immigration
6 attorneys meet clients for free, and the Brooklyn
7 Borough President hosts weekly constituent service...
8 services hours. The community can use the Civic
9 Commons for a range of programming including
10 informational workshops, voter registration drives,
11 and local committee meetings. At Central Library and
12 most of our branches, patrons can reserve meeting
13 rooms and space and space together.
14

15 Thanks to your investments over the years, we are
16 renovating one third of our branches and are
17 constantly working to upgrade all neighborhood
18 libraries so that they are welcoming and inspiring
19 spaces the kinds of spaces that communities deserve.

20 Chair Ossé, members of the committee: Brooklyn
21 Public Library is much more than a valuable
22 educational resource for Brooklynites. Our
23 programming and spaces are interwoven throughout the
24 fabric of our patrons social, civic, and cultural
25 lives. Unfortunately, despite growing needs

1 throughout our community, at a time when we ought to
2 be ramping up our services, we learned that our
3 operating support has been significantly reduced.
4 The library is the city's most democratic civic
5 institution, as the Chairman explained to us a few
6 moments ago. It protects free speech and nurtures
7 intellectual freedom for patrons of all ages and
8 backgrounds. It responds to the specific needs of
9 community members and provide services they need to
10 participate fully in public life. It empowers
11 informed decision-making at a time when our country
12 needs strong diverse voices more than ever, but we
13 can only meet those needs with your support. By
14 supporting a healthy thriving library system. You
15 are empowering the vibrant voices of our community.
16

17 Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, President Johnson.
19 I do want to acknowledge a couple more of my
20 colleagues who have joined us in this committee,
21 Councilmember Moya who is remote, and Councilmember
22 Joseph. President Marx?

23 PRESIDENT MARX: Thank you so much. I'm Tony
24 Marx the President New York Public Library. I'm
25 joined by Dr. Brandy McNeil, our Deputy Director of

1 Branch Programs and Services, as well as Brian
2 Bannon, the Merryl and James Tisch Director of the
3 Branch Libraries and Education, as well as other
4 colleagues from across the three systems.
5

6 Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I want to of course,
7 thank the speaker as well, all the members of the
8 committee for this opportunity to testify. You have
9 my written testimony. I am not going to read it to
10 you. The... Simply put, we are the most trusted and
11 the most used civic institution in this city. So
12 everything we do is about equity and civic
13 engagement. That is what we are at the heart of.
14 From our collections to our programs and services, to
15 our spaces, access to Wi Fi, all of which you've,
16 you've already eloquently discussed, Mr. Chair, and
17 Linda certainly has. I think the way I think about
18 this is: We are foundational. We're in every
19 neighborhood. Everyone uses us. Everyone trusts us.
20 And we are foundational for the notion of equity,
21 because equity only works if people have the
22 opportunity to learn, and to advance themselves, and
23 to find those opportunities when the world is not
24 presented them necessarily to them. The... And civic
25 engagement has to be based on information and

1 community, all of which, as Linda has also eloquently
2 described, is what we're doing. We've always been
3 foundational. I think the message today is: We are
4 more targeted. And we are more proactive now in
5 exactly those mission. The mission hasn't changed.
6 The understanding of the time we live in, and the
7 challenges of it, for people's sense of fairness and
8 equity, for their willingness or interest in civic
9 engagement means we have to step up. And I think
10 this hearing is a further inspiration for us to do
11 it. And also a chance for us to demonstrate how
12 we've been working at it, and discuss ways forward.

14 So in terms of collections, of course, we provide
15 the key free access to reading material and
16 knowledge, which is so foundational. We know that
17 the books we have -- millions and millions of books -
18 - are not available evenly across this city, that we
19 need to make sure that they represent the interests
20 of their communities. We have done so much work on
21 this, but there's more work always to be done. We
22 have to make sure that people are not scared to come
23 into the libraries. That's why we eliminated late
24 fines, after 100 years of basically a false
25 understanding of what that was going to do. It's why

1 this summer together with our colleagues, we focused
2 on not just the summer side, but the pandemic side.
3 We gave away a half a million books because in the
4 poorest neighborhoods of New York folks don't have
5 their own physical libraries that we want them to
6 establish and use our borrowing privileges to be
7 augmenting and adding to it. That was part of a
8 close to \$3 million investment this summer.

9
10 And including and making sure that we represent
11 communities, I also want to signal disab... those
12 members of the community with disabilities, The
13 Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library,
14 amongst other things provides 50,000 professionally
15 narrated titles amongst so many other services.

16 Going to services: Our educational programs fall
17 under the Tisch Director for Branch Education...
18 Libraries and Education, Brian Bannon and his
19 colleagues. And we are again focusing in a more
20 explicit way than ever on the under resourced
21 communities: whether it's our early literacy efforts,
22 or our after school programs, which last year were at
23 11 locations, and this year at 31, so that students
24 know there is a place you can go and get after school
25 help, that other kids can take for granted but too

1
2 many of our kids don't, and we know the difference
3 that can make. We've launched our Teens 360
4 initiative with the support... explicit support of
5 the mayor and private gifts, we will now be
6 establishing team centers in 20 libraries across the
7 city, again in mostly the under-resourced
8 neighborhoods of this city, using media, using music,
9 using technology to draw the teams in, already
10 happening and record numbers at the (inaudible)
11 library, but we want that to draw them in to develop
12 those skills, but also then we've got them. We can
13 talk about English language. We can talk about after
14 school. We can talk about colleges and our college
15 guidance programs. We can talk about tech skills,
16 all of it.

17 We'll be hiring more teen librarians to help
18 guide all of this, again with the city's support for
19 which we are so grateful.

20 In terms of the range of services for adults that
21 Dr. McNeil oversees, 70% of our tech classes are
22 offered in high-needs neighborhoods, and they are the
23 only such free offerings, as is true for English
24 language as well, career counseling and job support.

1
2 Just at the Bronx Library Center, the IDNYC
3 program, as again, Linda described as going through
4 the roof.

5 We're also doubling down in terms of our own
6 institutional practices -- not just what we can do in
7 terms of our services, but how we operate, and how we
8 use those operations. A good example is our Page
9 Program. It is one of the largest youth employer
10 programs in the city, hundreds of high school and
11 college-age youth. We restored it after the
12 pandemic. We've added to it, and we've said, "No,
13 this needs to be a more professionalized training
14 program," opportunities not just to shelf books, but
15 across the system, including in the central offices,
16 so that we can play our part in creating a diverse
17 pipeline of talent, not only into the library, where
18 so... such a disproportionate number of our employees
19 were pages, which is amazing, but also a pipeline of
20 talent and diversity for all kinds of other
21 operations, not just the library.

22 On civic engagement... look, the first thing I
23 want to say, sorry, is every book that is checked out
24 and returned is a civic act. We are the public good,
25 focused on learning, opportunity, education. And

1 every time New Yorkers use us, which is more than
2 they use any other institution, they are practicing
3 and learning what it means to be involved in a
4 community of public good. Whether it's us offering
5 knowledge and the background information, focusing on
6 the attitudes, the trust that the library both
7 demonstrates and receives, as well as how we can help
8 folks mobilize themselves, not in a partisan way, but
9 around local issues, so that they can be
10 interlocutors with you not just on not just on
11 participatory budgeting, but across the array of
12 issues. Yes, we are front and center for voter
13 education and registration. You'll find those
14 numbers in my testimony. We've also, of course, been
15 involved in participatory budgeting, and we love it
16 when our own branch technology and branch
17 improvements benefit from our neighbors saying that
18 needs to be a priority as it so often is. We've
19 launched a new center for educators in schools
20 because we have the most used research library on the
21 planet that has incredible treasures that we need to
22 get out into the classrooms, as the basis of
23 curricula, as the basis of lesson plans. Such
24 exciting stuff. We're working with the mayor's
25

1 office on New York City Speaks, as well as thinking
2 of other areas to get explicitly engaged in, more
3 civic action -- not just the foundational work, which
4 is so essential, but to keep going so that our
5 efforts meet the rising challenge, the rising crisis
6 of civic engagement.
7

8 The teen centers: Again another way to get teens
9 in and then get them involved in civic work in
10 various experiments.

11 In conclusion, the public library is a radical
12 institution. Our mission is to provide free access
13 of knowledge and opportunity to all New Yorkers. And
14 no one does it more or better or even is in the same
15 zip code as the public libraries.

16 That means we need to make extra effort. We have
17 to make extra effort to prioritize our resources and
18 to target our services, not to leave anyone behind,
19 but not to pretend that everyone is equally in need
20 of everything. We're past that.

21 In this moment, we have to ensure that there are
22 institutions that the public can trust and the public
23 can rely on. And we are here to do everything to
24 make sure that we can be that for New Yorkers, and
25 that we are partners with you and the city council

1
2 and the administration in ensuring that New Yorkers
3 get everything they deserve from their libraries now,
4 and going forward. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you President Marx. I
6 do want to acknowledge another colleague that has
7 joined us: Councilmember Shahana Hanif, and Mr.
8 Buren.

9 MR. BURON: Good afternoon. I am Nick Buron,
10 Chief Librarian and Senior Vice President of the
11 Queens Public Library. On behalf of the library and
12 our president and CEO Dennis Walcott, it is a
13 pleasure to be here. Thank you, Chair Ossé and the
14 members of this esteemed committee for the
15 opportunity to speak with you regarding the key role
16 public libraries play in advancing equity and civic
17 engagement.

18 Queens Public Library is committed to serving the
19 most diverse county in the nation, and ensuring
20 equity of access and opportunity is at the heart of
21 our work. Regardless of one's background, identity,
22 socio economic circumstances or points of view
23 libraries welcome, everyone.

24 Despite the attacks on intellectual freedom and
25 efforts to censor certain literary works, and

1
2 programs in our libraries across the nation, we
3 continue to make sure that libraries are spaces where
4 all are welcomed with dignity and respect, and are
5 able to freely seek access and express diverse
6 viewpoints.

7 In 2018 QPL established system wide equity,
8 diversity and inclusion training and implicit bias
9 workshops for all of our staff. In 2020, building on
10 the work and in response to the murders of George
11 Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and many other black people,
12 and the nation's reckoning around race and systematic
13 racism in our society, Mr. Walcott established the
14 President's Council for Racial Equity, PCRE, at the
15 library. Its mission is to identify racial barriers
16 and policies, procedures, practice and history that
17 have had negative impact on black employees and
18 customers, and to identify solutions to create more
19 equitable experience for all. PCRE members who total
20 over 50 dedicated employees are examining QPL
21 recruitment, hiring and promotion practices, culture,
22 learning and growth opportunities, governance,
23 programs and services, collections and outreach and
24 marketing strategies. The PCRE is working with a
25 consulting firm that specializes in supporting anti-

1 racism, diversity, equity and inclusion efforts at
2 nonprofits and government organizations to create a
3 comprehensive plan for lasting change at our
4 institution. The library's LGBTQ+ allies committee
5 formed in 2018 aims to promote the visibility of
6 LGBTQ lives, to deepen understanding, and to ensure
7 an inclusive environment for staff and the public.
8

9 Since its creation, the committee has led to the
10 development of numerous measures to make sure the
11 public feels more welcome. For instance, earlier
12 this year, the committee spearheaded the distribution
13 for the entrance of all of our locations of window
14 decals with QPL logos, the pride flag, and the phrase
15 "Everyone Is Welcome Here" in English, Spanish and
16 Chinese.

17 Additionally, recognizing that some customers may
18 not be comfortable speaking to staff about personal
19 situations, the committee created signs listing a
20 range of potentially sensitive topics, and
21 identifying where such books are located within our
22 collections. Located in the collections area of
23 every QPL library, with 40 topics listed, these
24 signs... these signs guide customers in finding
25 subjects such as abortion, depression, loss of a

1 child and personal finance. The committee also
2 supports the library's participation in the annual
3 Queen's Pride Parade and Festival. Staff customers
4 and volunteers march under the QPL banner in
5 celebration and solidarity, and offer resources and
6 services during the parade.
7

8 In 2019, we were honored with the Screaming
9 Queens award, awarded to the group with the best
10 sound at the parade.

11 [LAUGHTER]

12 Queens is the home of nearly 1.1 million
13 immigrants speaking over 150 languages. For 45 years
14 QPL's New Americans Program has aided the borough's
15 immigrants and adapting to life in the United States
16 while celebrating their cultures. Immigrants can
17 come to our libraries and learn English, their
18 rights, and the realities of the immigration process,
19 preparing for the citizens exam and receive support
20 from experienced lawyers and staff. Our English
21 language learner and high school equivalency classes
22 are offered in beginner, intermediate, and advanced
23 levels. And we offer supplemental educational
24 applications, allowing students to hone their skills
25 at their own pace. With attendance of over 15,500

1
2 and exit surveys showing educational gains of 60%,
3 these classes provide quality lessons with devoted
4 instructors at no cost. QPL has been instrumental in
5 helping asylum seekers in Queens adjust to their
6 circumstances. Staff have conducted outreach in
7 shelters where people are staying providing them with
8 books, games, school supplies, and gloves, as well as
9 information on free library services such as ESL
10 classes and our hotspot lending program and other QPL
11 resources. When asylum seekers come to our central
12 library to... to apply for ID NYC cards, staff
13 volunteered their time to provide interpretation
14 services to answer questions and provide assistance
15 in the application process. Our Adult Learner Center
16 case managers will be making appointments for people
17 with the city's new Asylum Seeker Resource Navigation
18 Centers. We will be expanding our Spanish language
19 and bilingual collections at targeted locations for
20 both adults and children. We have trained staff
21 system wide so they are prepared to meet the needs of
22 our newest arrivals, and we will continue to work
23 with the Adams administration to provide additional
24 support.

1
2 On December 5, we launched Language Line, a live
3 phone-based interpretation service at all of our
4 locations. Each public service location has at least
5 one handset at a reference desk or circulation desk.
6 With the ability to... to interpret 240 languages,
7 this new service removes the significant barrier to
8 access to our resources and other information for
9 many customers. Language Line Solutions, a major
10 provider of interpretation and translation services
11 around the world, is operating the system. After
12 identifying their languages from... from a list of 36
13 of the most commonly spoken in Queens, customers can
14 have three-way communications with a staff member and
15 interpreter. So far customer speaking languages such
16 as Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, French, Arabic,
17 Pashtu, Russian, and Urdu have used the service at
18 Central, Flushing, Poppenheusen, Queensboro Hill, and
19 South Ozone Park among other locations.

20 In partnership with the New York City Mayor's
21 Office of Immigrant Affairs, MOYA, we offer Action
22 NYC, a program that allows New Yorkers to access free
23 and safe immigration legal help. In fiscal year
24 2021, despite the COVID 19 pandemic, we provided over
25 110 immigration sessions. We also collaborated with

1
2 MOYA and the US Citizenship and Immigration Services
3 for our New Americans Corners: dedicated spaces at
4 every location that serves as an easy way for
5 immigrants to find resources on how to become US
6 citizens. These services are extremely popular
7 across the borough. At our Laurelton branch, a
8 Jamaican immigrant customer came to the library
9 worried about preparing for her upcoming citizenship
10 exam. The Customer Service Specialist offered to
11 review the materials with her during the weekly one-
12 on-one session over the course of eight weeks. The
13 patron, who is now studying to become a nurse,
14 recently visited the library to show the specialist
15 her citizenship certificate and thank him for all his
16 help.

17 The Far Rockaway teen library provides teens with
18 dedicated space they can call their own, helping them
19 explore their interests and learn outside the
20 classroom with their peers and trusted adults. In
21 partnership with the Queens defenders, the library
22 has a youth justice court, which teaches 13 to 19-
23 year-olds about the criminal justice system, and
24 provides an alternative response to youth crime in
25 the community.

1
2 During the pandemic 40 to 50 youth met virtually
3 each week to participate in Know Your Rights
4 workshops, mock trials, and a multi week series
5 called Justice Without Barriers, which engage the
6 formerly incarcerated and their families. Youth
7 Justice Court often serves as a pipeline for its
8 participants to positive roles within the community.
9 For example, Youth Justice Court provided Jaden Gab,
10 who is the youngest member of the Queens Community
11 Board 14, where he advocates for the youth of Far
12 Rockaway.

13 In October we announced the expansion of a
14 successful program to several other libraries under
15 the mayor's teen initiative. In addition to the
16 Youth Justice Court sites, QPL is upgrading teen
17 centers at Central, Cambria Heights and the Flushing
18 libraries, as well as establishing new centers at the
19 Long Island City Library.

20 With guidance and assistance from our dedicated
21 staff, teens will be able to develop creative and
22 technology skills, receive counseling and resources
23 to navigate the college application process, and
24 identify a post-secondary path, and learn the impact
25 of community service and civic engagement.

1
2 For young adults who are 16 to 24 years old, our
3 staff at the central library and Far Rockaway teen
4 library will offer high school equivalency
5 preparations, as well as digital literacy support,
6 workforce readiness, and resume workshop case
7 management services and more.

8 For too long our policies of imposing fines for
9 overdue library materials, discouraged individuals
10 from accessing our services, especially our youth.
11 In October 2021, Queens Public Library along with our
12 colleagues at Brooklyn and New York Public Library's
13 permanently entered the practice of charging late
14 fines on overdue materials and cleared all existing
15 late fines on customer accounts. When the policy was
16 enacted, there was a 10% increase in the number of
17 impacted card holders who borrowed physical material
18 compared to the month prior, and a 16% increase in
19 requested activity among impacted card holders. Now
20 more than a year into implementation, 4898 customers
21 who have had their phones removed as a result of the
22 policy change have returned to us our free resources.
23 We hope this policy continues to encourage
24 customers, especially our youngest users to come back
25 to their local library.

1
2 Under the GoVoteNYC grant, Queens Public Library
3 worked with over 20 partners to conduct 37 programs
4 reaching 3100 participants. We also conducted nine
5 outreach events, connected with 3500 individuals, and
6 hosted text banking with approximately a quarter of a
7 million messages delivered. Last month 12 of our
8 library served as general election sites and four
9 served as early voting locations.

10 QPL volunteer opportunities encourage people to
11 contribute to their communities in meaningful and
12 sustained ways. For example, our volunteers support
13 mobile food pantries, held in our libraries in
14 partnership with food bank for NYC, provided
15 interpretation services for asylum seekers and
16 conduct English conversation groups for New
17 Americans. In October 2020 QPL's Volunteer Services
18 Department began a six-month series focused on
19 community building and engagement to encourage
20 individuals to become more active in civic education
21 and social service arenas affecting their
22 neighborhood. These discussions covered vital topics
23 such as strategies for community change, public
24 speaking, and tools for strategic planning.

1
2 Additionally, the library created an online
3 resource, Microsite, supporting the goals of the
4 project. This initiative gained a local, national,
5 and international audience with nearly 1000 people
6 registering for activities and over 300 individuals
7 attending the workshops. In the upcoming year, we
8 are continuing this important series with a
9 concentration on media literacy, cultural awareness,
10 community wellness, and emergency preparedness. Last
11 year, QPL worked with the NYC Department of
12 Corrections and other community partners on Get Out
13 The Vote efforts on Rikers Island. Our correctional
14 Outreach Service staff created two videos for inmates
15 tablets in English and Spanish focusing on voter
16 information and voting rights. Prior to the 2021
17 election, the voter information video was viewed by
18 over 100 individuals, while the latter was watched
19 nearly 75 times. We also distribute Make Your Voice
20 Heard fliers to 40 housing units and included them in
21 book packages. These efforts continue into 2022.

22 When the tablets were discontinued at Rikers, we
23 worked closely with NYC votes to create a hardcopy
24 voter guide for the upcoming election and distributed
25 it throughout Rikers Island.

1
2 These are just a few of the examples of the work
3 QPL staff do each day to help people find success in
4 their lives and participate in our democracy.

5 Unfortunately, at a time when NYC public libraries
6 should be expanding services for our customers, QPL
7 is facing significant cuts to our budget. While we
8 are still reviewing the potential impact, it is clear
9 that if these cuts are not reversed library
10 operations will be greatly affected. We are in
11 ongoing communications with the administration
12 regarding the consequences of the proposed cuts, and
13 we'll be able to provide an assessment at our
14 preliminary budget hearing in the new year.

15 Despite the challenges ahead. We remain
16 dedicated to providing high quality resources,
17 information and opportunity for all.

18 Thank you for your partnership and creating a
19 more equitable and engaged city. And thank you
20 again, Chair for the opportunity to speak today.

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, Mr. Buron. We've
22 been joined by Councilmember Charles Barron, and I
23 want to turn to him for some brief remarks on
24 Resolution number 285.

1
2 COUNCILMEMBER BARRON: Thank you very much, Mr.
3 Chair. First of all, I want to thank you for this
4 historic resolution. This is something that has not
5 come to the floor ever in the city council, no matter
6 how much we tried to make it happen, and that's a
7 resolution on calling the United States Congress and
8 President to end the embargo on Cuba. Cuba has an
9 island of 11 million people, and over the years since
10 -- it's been like 60 years since the revolution in
11 1959 -- America has either tried to assassinate Fidel
12 Castro over 600 times, or the embargo that they held
13 highly against the Cuban people, which hurt the Cuban
14 people, and is hurting the Cuban people right now,
15 even though the whole world has said... the whole
16 world... the last time they brought the resolution
17 before the United Nations, the world of over 190 some
18 odd countries, 184 countries said and the embargo.
19 It has no use for anything but vindictiveness and
20 this is not what countries should be about. So this
21 resolution is basically saying: ban the travel to
22 Cuba, allow people to travel to Cuba, allow Cuba to
23 use its products like vaccines -- they have some of
24 the best vaccine in the world, but they can't share
25 it with anybody because of the embargo. And they

1 also have the best medical school in the world. I've
2 been to Cuba. And to my surprise when I went to the
3 international medical school, two students said,
4 "Hey, Councilman Baron, how you doing?" There were
5 two students from East New York getting a free
6 medical education from Cuba only if they commit to
7 come back to their community and use their
8 experiences for that.

10 So Cuba has been the friend of Africa. A lot of
11 our countries in Africa when they were under
12 colonialism, it was Cuba that came forth in Angola,
13 and then Zimbabwe, and then South Africa. It was
14 Cuba who came forth to help Patrice Lumumba and the
15 Congo, and in Latin America. Cuba has been there
16 sending doctors, because they believe in
17 internationalism... sending doctors and technicians.
18 I went to the island of Grenada, and Maurice Bishop,
19 under the leadership of the New JEWEL Movement, Cuba
20 was there helping them build an International
21 Airport. Went to Jamaica, and there was Michael
22 Manley, the Prime Minister of Jamaica: Cuba was
23 there helping them with them. So Cuba has had an
24 international commitment to helping developing
25 countries in the world.

1
2 Now, it's our opportunity, our chance to tell
3 this government: Enough is enough. End the band.
4 End the blockades and embargo, and the ban on
5 traveling, so Cuba can develop as a nation, and as a
6 friendly nation. And they always try to accuse Cuba
7 of being a bastion for terrorism. That's a lie. It
8 never happened. They never supported any terrorism.
9 They've been the victims of terrorism, but they never
10 supported any form of terrorism.

11 So this resolution we are putting forward is just
12 to bring the correct... the right information about
13 Cuba. And when we benefit Cuba, we benefit those of
14 us here in New York City, because of what they're
15 able to contribute throughout the world. It is the
16 humane thing. This is a human rights issue, and the
17 Cuban government is suffering. The Cuban people are
18 suffering. When governments go to war, the people
19 that really suffer is not the government officials.
20 It's the people in these countries. So I always try
21 to separate the government from the people, because
22 the people in most countries have good, hard work and
23 trying to survive people. It's the government's that
24 have the problem, and cause the problem for
25 everybody.

1
2 So I want to thank you once again, once again,
3 Mr. Chair for allowing this resolution to go forward.
4 And I hope that all of us can support it. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you, Councilmember
6 Barron. And I know Councilmember Dinowitz has a time
7 constraint, so I want to turn to him for initial
8 questions.

9 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you, Chair. Thank
10 you for your flexibility. Childcare these days is
11 a...

12 My first question is for President Marx. So
13 first, I always say: I love our libraries, and not
14 just as places for our kids and families to go, but
15 you as an agency are always responsive when my office
16 reaches out. Last year, we reached out about civil
17 service exam books and preparation books in one of
18 the neighborhoods in my district in... in Bengali.
19 We reached out. You provided those books at the
20 library.

21 This year, we reached out. You were distributing
22 books, as you mentioned in your testimony. We had
23 books in English and Spanish, but none in Bengali.
24 We reached out, and you provided those books. And
25

1
2 now our children in the neighborhood have books to
3 bring home.

4 So my question is: I'm appreciative that when I
5 reached out, you know, you respond, but do you do
6 community surveys? Or do you look at census data to
7 actually proactively provide the books and the
8 languages that the communities need? Because it...
9 it seems that it's done in response -- thank you for
10 the response -- but... but do you do it proactively?

11 PRESIDENT MARX: So thank you, Councilman.
12 The... Yes is the answer. We both... We're
13 delighted to get feedback. We can always improve by
14 feedback, no matter how good our systems are. And we
15 can always do better at this. But we have an
16 elaborate back office. We share part of that with...
17 with Brooklyn. We call it Book Ops. And we are
18 getting data. We have a whole data... We have a
19 whole data operational strategy operation that looks
20 at the shifts of demands and demographics in the
21 neighborhood, under Brian and his team, working to
22 say, "Okay, how do we shift our collection strategy?"
23 We know that, you know, the neighborhood I grew up
24 in, Inwood, was Irish and Jewish. It's now
25 Dominican. Obviously what's in that library needs to

1
2 change, and has changed. And we do that
3 systematically across the city. That's the story of
4 New York. Is it... Do we always get it absolutely
5 right? Or in a timely way? Or miss a particular
6 book that a particular program needs? We... That
7 happens and we're delighted to add whatever we can.
8 But we all agree we need our collections to be
9 reflective of the neighborhoods and meet the
10 interests and demands of our neighborhood.

11 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Right. Thank... Thank
12 you for that. I would... I would look out for
13 those... those languages that don't make up, you
14 know, the plurality the top, I guess, tier languages.
15 But really, you know, it would be very impactful to
16 have those books in the libraries as, you know, as a
17 matter of course, not as a matter of reaching out.
18 My second question: I was really pleased to hear in
19 both the Brooklyn and Queens testimony talk about
20 anti-racist and anti... anti-bias training. I know,
21 across the country this was done in response to
22 the... to the George Floyd murder. You know, we were
23 speaking before the committee here, and these are the
24 lives of my students that are going to be positively
25 impacted. You know, you mentioned the Queens

1
2 Library, welcoming the LGBTQ community is so
3 important as we're seeing a rise in hate. We are
4 also over the years seeing a rise in hate against our
5 Asian brothers and sisters. And of course, anyone
6 who watches the news or reads NYPD hate crime
7 statistics will know there's a significant increase
8 in antisemitism, both in terms of reported hate
9 crimes and in terms of what... let's just call them
10 celebrities, or former presidents inviting Holocaust
11 deniers to wine and dine with him.

12 So just to read in the third quarter, the Hate
13 Crimes Incidents by Bias Motivation: There were 47
14 against Jewish New Yorkers, 21 against Asian New
15 Yorkers, 18 against what the NYPD identifies as anti-
16 male homosexual (gay). The second quarter, 64
17 against Jewish, Asian 20, anti-male homosexual 24 in
18 the second quarter.

19 I'm bringing all this up to ask. The question
20 is: How often do you go back and revisit your anti-
21 bias, anti-hate trainings? And does it explicitly
22 include things like antisemitism, which we are seeing
23 a significant rise in both in physical verbal
24 assault, Holocaust denying? Does it explicitly
25 include anti-Asian hate, anti-LGBTQ, and what other

1
2 efforts are you making to ensure that all of our
3 communities are welcomed and educated and coming
4 together so we can prevent these types of... this
5 increase in hate that we are we're seeing is deeply
6 troubling for... for all of us.

7 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So one of the things that we
8 learned in the aftermath of the George Floyd killing
9 was the importance of not only visiting these things
10 episodically, but making sure that (a) our own house
11 was in order, that we were in fact, not even
12 unconsciously somehow contributing to the problem,
13 but that we were consciously making sure that we were
14 not engaging in any behavior that would be deemed
15 anti-race... racist, or antisemitic, anti-Asian,
16 certainly anti-LBGTQ. And also making sure that the
17 way we operate on a daily basis incorporates that
18 philosophy, day in and day out. And so it's a
19 very... as I said, it's part of our strategic plan.
20 It's part of what we've been very conscious of,
21 certainly before George Floyd, but perhaps not with
22 the same level of urgency, as we've been addressing
23 these topics over the past two or three years.

24 MR. BURON: So as I stated that we have started
25 with EDI training, even before the pandemic, and

1 before the increase of what you've identified, and
2 that we are looking at all of our internal policies
3 as well. So we're not just looking at them for...
4 for... we're looking at them overall, to make sure
5 that they are aligned with our staff, and then how we
6 project that out to our customers.
7

8 Every Tuesday morning, we... Most of our branches
9 are closed on Tuesday morning. That is a time for us
10 to identify trainings that all in staff needs. So
11 it's a great opportunity for all the staff to be able
12 to participate. So we do trainings every week, and
13 we modify them accordingly. So we do... So we would
14 do, like I was saying, EDI training. We were doing
15 anti-racist training. Our security staff actually
16 goes out to all... goes out to all of our branches to
17 work with our... our staff so that when they identify
18 someone coming in -- and certainly we've had
19 incidents where people come in and they are quite
20 offensive. And how do we protect our staff? How do
21 we protect our customers? And when is it time to
22 call in the authorities to make sure that people like
23 you know who are behaving like that leave the
24 premises? Because there's no place for that.
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We've also updated our policies so that staff feel that they have more... they have more backup when it comes to reporting incidences against them. Quite honestly, whether they be from maybe other staff, but oftentimes from... from our customers, and then we investigate that. And to make sure that our staff... Our number one priority is the safety of our staff, mentally and physically, and the safety of everyone that's in the building. And we do that on an ongoing basis.

COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you. Of course, I would, I would hope it... I mean, the purpose of these trainings in the education and of course bringing... bringing the children in as part of your education that you so wonderfully do, is to prevent those things from ever happening in the first place. And that's, of course, I think, the ultimate goal.

I would ask that you treat the rise in rhetoric against, you know, against the LGBTQ community, and against the Jewish community, the rise in rhetoric and hate crimes, with a sense of urgency that it deserves, and it needs. And I hope that that that becomes integral and part of your Tuesday morning

1 meetings, and more long-term solution to these
2 problems.
3

4 And I would add, I think that, I don't know one
5 way or the other as you do, but I would say this is a
6 problem, when... when these trainings are done, and
7 that when decisions are made, that members of the
8 specific community are included in the development of
9 those trainings. It seems silly that I have to say
10 that, but unfortunately, we've come across a lot of
11 trainings that teach, you know, a lot of non-black
12 people are, you know, creating these trainings about
13 how to not be... you know, about what it's like to be
14 black. And non-Asians are, you know, part of
15 creating these trainings about... about the... the
16 experiences of the Asian community. I can go on and
17 on. But I would just encourage you and make sure
18 that that very obvious thing is, which is not obvious
19 to so many other people and agencies, is integral in
20 your in your planning.

21 I again want to thank the Chair for your
22 flexibility and for this hearing. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Of course, thank you. And I
24 want to dive straight into the meat of this hearing
25 in terms of the PEGs, which is something that we've

1
2 all acknowledged throughout this hearing already, all
3 three of you through your testimonies, as well as
4 mine in my opener. And it's something that we truly
5 believe it's going to affect one of the only public
6 spaces in New York City, which is our libraries. So
7 I want to start by saying -- and we'll start with
8 you, President Johnson -- how do you anticipate that
9 the current PEG and additional cuts in the coming
10 years will affect your programming related to equity
11 and civic engagement?

12 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah, obviously, this is a
13 topic that's front of mind for all of us, as we've
14 been trying to absorb the news, and then plan for the
15 future. And I think that in the current fiscal year,
16 we anticipated a cut. It's been difficult to hire
17 people so that while we are operating with a much
18 reduced staff right now, and not too a good end. I
19 mean, it's... it's challenging to maintain hours when
20 you don't have enough staff, but we've been diligent
21 about making that work. But there is just a long...
22 you can make that work.

23 And so our hope was that we would get through the
24 current year and then... and I will add that it... as
25 difficult as... as it has been to hire, we've been

1 making progress. So there was a time when we were
2 losing people at a faster clip than we were able to
3 replace them. That has leveled out. But we're still
4 down quite a number of positions.

5
6 The real problems will come in in the next fiscal
7 year when our baseline budget will be cut. And the
8 thing about the library business is that it is highly
9 labor intensive. There are not a lot of places to go
10 to save money to cut the budget. And basically, it
11 comes down to wages and salaries. And that
12 translates to the number of hours that we will be
13 able to be opened. And then that of course affects
14 the number of programs that you're able to offer.

15 And so it has a cascading effect, and a bad one.
16 And, you know, as I said in my remarks, and both my
17 colleagues also reiterated that, at a time when we
18 shouldn't be open longer hours, when we should be
19 doing more of the great work that we do and being
20 creative about new and innovative ways to deliver
21 service, we will in fact be forced to operate fewer
22 hours. I'm not saying that any one branch would be
23 closed altogether, but there will be a cut back and
24 therefore there will be a diminution in the amount of
25 programming that we're able to do.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And I'm understanding that
3 that same sentiment is... rings true for you, Mr.
4 Buron, and you President Marx, correct? Go ahead.

5 PRESIDENT MARX: When we think about this, I
6 mean, the way... sorry... the way to think of... the
7 way we think about this... I think about it, and it
8 keeps me up nights thinking about this is: Given
9 everything we have built to do. And the even greater
10 demand that we continue to struggle to keep up with,
11 um, what happens when... This year we can absorb an
12 awful lot just because we've been good managers,
13 stewards of our resources. But the coming PEGs will
14 simply put us in the question of saying: What gives?
15 Is it the basics -- hours, branches, the stuff that
16 New Yorkers think of as foundational, and a right to
17 know that their library will be open -- or is it the
18 innovative education programs, opportunity programs,
19 that working with the mayor with the City Council,
20 we've been building and targeting exactly the needs,
21 because we are everywhere, we're trusted everywhere,
22 and we have the capacity to innovate accordingly?

23 The PEG going forward... the next PEG will
24 present us with the choice of which of those gifts --
25 is it the basics of the furniture, the hours, the

1 number of... you know, the whatever it is, the... how
2 many staff we can have, and therefore what services
3 we can offer? Or are we going to start having a
4 backtrack on exactly the investments that we've said
5 we need to be doing at this juncture for all the
6 groups and individuals that we've been discussing?
7 That is a horrible situation to be in? The... The
8 mayor has made it clear that he has priorities. We
9 understand those priorities. We understand there are
10 hard choices to be made. We understand the
11 importance of, you know, the crime issues that the
12 mayor is addressing.

14 We also noticed that he has pulled out pedagogy
15 as the exception. The investments the city needs to
16 make are in making sure that the citizens are secure,
17 and that they are... have the opportunities to learn.
18 That is the business we are in. We should not be
19 in... having to make choices of throwing things
20 overboard that we've all built, you know, as
21 essential items over these last years.

22 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I would just add one thing.

23 And that is I don't... I don't think that we'll
24 actually be in a situation where we... it's an
25 either-or. I think we will be cutting both. That we

1 will be... if you talk... if you look at the numbers
2 as they've been presented. And I know the dance has
3 just begun, as we call it. But if we end up where we
4 are today, we will be cutting everywhere that we can.
5 And so that's a terrible place to be.

6
7 MR. BURON: I would only add that our greatest
8 resource is the staff that we have in our buildings
9 who are serving the public. You heard today, the
10 incredible wide range of things that we are doing,
11 topics that we are doing, initiatives that we're
12 doing, the amount that we're helping the city, the
13 amount that we're working with the city, and clearly,
14 if we receive less resources, we are clearly... we
15 need to do our... we have no choice but to do less,
16 and that would be a great shame for the city.

17 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And I want to ask... and this
18 is all under the same umbrella of the PEGs topic.
19 And it's okay if you don't have these numbers now.
20 But we are talking about the potential that the
21 library would have to cut back on hours and
22 potentially days. Have you all made those
23 calculations in terms of what these numbers would
24 look like?

1
2 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: We have not. We're just in
3 the process of making those calculations. And also,
4 at the same time ramping up an advocacy program to
5 see if we can't do better than... than the news that
6 was recently delivered.

7 MR. BUROON: I would just say the same thing for
8 us. And in fact, there will be multiple scenarios
9 depending on how much really there is cut. And so
10 there's a lot of work to do. But right now, as Linda
11 said, now's the time to explain to everyone the hard
12 work that we're doing so that we don't get to that
13 point.

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I think in terms of the
15 ramping up of the advocacy campaign, it would be
16 helpful for you know, myself as well as other
17 Councilmembers that are supporters of the libraries,
18 and do not want to see these PEGs come into fruition,
19 it'd be helpful to have a picture or an idea of what
20 these PEGs would look like, in terms of how much
21 staff would be lost, how many... whose wages would be
22 cut, how many hours would be cut from each library
23 branch, maybe potential closures of these specific
24 branch... branches.

1
2 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You'll be tired of us. We
3 will give testimony and we will be sure that you are
4 well informed.

5 PRESIDENT MARX: I mean look, we don't want to
6 scare our colleagues. Staff morale is important.
7 The staff are the most important resource that we
8 have. But we also need to be honest about what would
9 happen and you know what we would not be able to do,
10 what we would not be able to continue, and that's
11 fine, you know, but we're not going hide from what
12 the potential scale of it would be while we work to
13 ensure that that does not happen, and we protect all
14 those services... protect those services as well as,
15 you know, our essential staff, which are, you know...
16 We've spent decades building this amazing staff. We
17 can't be... You know, we have to keep everybody on
18 board.

19 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: No doubt everyone sitting at
20 this table says the same thing. But we all feel --
21 and feel that we've demonstrated over time -- that we
22 do... Sorry. It sounds self-serving. But we do a
23 really incredible job with the money that we are
24 granted. That we make the most of every dollar.
25 That we deliver, you know, far and away more than

1
2 what would normally be expected, given the size of
3 our budgets, relative to the size of our respective
4 institutions. I hate to say, you know, you get a lot
5 for your buck with us, but... but it's really, it's
6 really true. We do good work.

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And I mean, just a piece of
8 advice, even though you probably know this already:
9 Once you guys are ramping up again, you know, DC 37
10 is just a great ally to us as a support system, in
11 providing some pressure on the administration to
12 fight against those potential cuts.

13 Something that I wanted to ask you, because, you
14 know, the city likes to plan hearings at the same
15 time right now. And there's a very important hearing
16 happening across the street at City Hall, where the
17 Finance Committee is discussing the November plan and
18 the PEGs that are impacting our various different
19 systems. What questions would you want
20 Councilmembers or myself to ask of the administration
21 in terms of these PEGs when it pertains to the
22 libraries?

23 PRESIDENT MARX: Again, the administration: They
24 are... they have their challenges, and they have been

1
2 incredible partners, and we will work through this
3 together.

4 I mean, I think... you know, that there is the
5 sort of hope that we can just continue to sort of
6 find ways to absorb cuts that don't reduce the
7 staffing numbers or the services or the hours of the
8 programs. The simple fact is we've... we've been
9 playing that game for years getting more efficient,
10 even though I have a hard time describing sort of the
11 world of education in efficiency terms, but we have
12 become more efficient.

13 But at some point, you get to the bone. And you
14 know, we keep getting closer and closer to that bone.
15 And this may push us over the edge. And at that
16 point, the question is, what is it you want us to
17 stop doing, exactly, right?

18 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I mean, I think I think the
19 question really is, you know, what you expect of your
20 partners. And we've been -- and especially during
21 the pandemic -- worked really hard to figure out how
22 to be the best partners to the city that we could be,
23 and to step up to the plate to help whether it was
24 with COVID testing, or helping people find vaccines.
25 It went on and on. It wasn't exactly what we were

1
2 accustomed to doing in the past, but I think it is
3 demonstrative of exactly the kind of work that we're
4 willing to do, and that if you reduce our services,
5 it's not clear where the slack is picked up. It's
6 not clear what other institutions or city agencies
7 will step in and take care of the people that, you
8 know, are patrons, the millions of people.

9 I mean, we always love to quote this number, you
10 know, just how many people come to visit libraries in
11 a given year. Again, we get over a million people
12 just at our central library. But the fact that more
13 people visit the libraries in the city of New York
14 than go to all sporting events in you know, in all
15 teams combined. I mean, people really do trust us,
16 and come to us, and if we're not there, I don't
17 really know where they would go.

18 MR. BURON: So it's less of a question than, you
19 know, an advocate... an internal advocate for us.
20 And it's important when the city does their budgets
21 to determine what are the priorities for the city.
22 And yet again, I think what you've heard here today,
23 is that we hit on education. We hit, you know,
24 keeping communities safe. We hit on sustainability.
25 We hit on equity. All the priorities that the city

1
2 has said, we actually do very well in coordination
3 with the city and with our staff, and to cut us would
4 be to cut those priorities.

5 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Did you all engage in dialogue
6 with the administration prior to PEGs coming out?

7 MR. BURON: I mean, I would say we're always in
8 conversation (crosstalk)

9 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: About the PEGs. About the
10 potential... Was that a topic of discussion with the
11 administration?

12 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So our finance team -- and
13 I'm sure the same is true of Queens in New York
14 Public Library -- are in constant touch with the
15 Office of Management and Budget. It's a... It's a
16 dialogue that never stops.

17 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Okay. Speaking of libraries
18 taking the responsibility of a multitude of different
19 issues that our city seems to encounter, whether it's
20 the census, whether it's, you know, getting involved
21 in civic... civic leadership, you know, vaccine
22 drives. A topic of discussion in the city right now
23 is obviously our asylum... asylum seekers and the
24 migrant crisis that is increasing at a daily rate.
25 And, Mr. Buron, I know you acknowledge some of the

1
2 services that the libraries have been providing for
3 the migrants in QPL. But I want to start with asking
4 you, you know, and all three of you, that the three
5 library systems provide a variety of civic
6 engagement, programming, and services, to support
7 immigrants and BIPOC New Yorkers: I want you to
8 describe the outreach being done to promote these
9 programs: Services and events to immigrants and
10 BIPOC New Yorkers, and how do these PEGs impact the
11 system's capacity to do thorough and comprehensive
12 outreach?

13 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I'll start. First of all,
14 you know, as I said, it'll be a situation where we
15 have to cut...

16 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Everywhere.

17 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah. And the work that
18 we're doing, especially with our newest Americans,
19 the... the asylum seekers. It, you know, there
20 are... there's transitional housing near branches,
21 and the local branches are bringing material to the
22 housing -- in our case, hotels -- bringing backpacks
23 filled with books, making sure that our IDNYC offices
24 are staffed and open, because the lines there have
25 grown exponentially since all this began. So we're

1 very sensitive to the situation, and we're, you
2 know... and we are... these are our new patrons, and
3 we're doing our best to make sure that they have
4 library cards, IDNYC cards, and everything that we
5 can do to make their lives better.

6
7 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And just overall, yes or no
8 question: Have you seen migrants and asylum seekers
9 coming into all of your spaces?

10 MR. BURON: We've seen a tremendous amount. A
11 tremendous amount. There is a good example of this
12 is on a Monday morning at the... at our central
13 library in Jamaica, we have a line that goes from our
14 door around the block, because what we're seeing is
15 one of the first steps that... that these new
16 arrivals, when they come off, they go to temporary
17 housing where we have relationships with these
18 temporary housing already, so that we're able to do
19 outreach to those temporary housing. And they need
20 an IDNYC card. Now, it is not our program, per se,
21 but we... but the space that we give them means that
22 they're coming to the library, to a trusted place.
23 We take that very seriously. And the way we interact
24 with people who are scared, have young children, they
25 come for that ID, and like I said, you know,

1
2 sometimes they're waiting hours in line. To not be
3 able to interact with someone in their own language
4 is also very scary. So we make sure our staff in our
5 central library is volunteering to speak, you know,
6 Spanish with them, for those that speak Spanish, or
7 our administrative staff, who are in our central
8 library building are volunteering to do this too, to
9 make sure that there's always someone who can
10 communicate. It's the start of communication. It's
11 working with them to get that ID, so they can go into
12 their kids schools, which they cannot do, if you
13 don't have some form of identification. It's helping
14 them enroll their kids in school. Enrolling in
15 benefits, finding more than temporary housing. It's
16 overwhelming for the city to be sure. And we could
17 not be a better partner for the city in these times
18 of crisis and challenges.

19 PRESIDENT MARX: For us, the Bronx Library Center
20 is probably ground zero for this. And obviously the
21 IDNYC program is... is essential.

22 Look, let me just state the... the obvious. This
23 is a city... This is a country of immigrants,
24 period. This is not a burden we should shirk or look
25 to avoid. This is what has made New York the center

1
2 of the world: That we are welcoming to the diversity
3 of talent that makes us the center of the world.

4 This is a difficult set of circumstances all
5 kinds of wacko politics nationally going on around
6 this. I'll just say this administration has been a
7 great partner with us consistently. I mean, whether
8 it goes back to the investment in the Teen Centers
9 that we've talked about. But on this issue, we met
10 just yesterday, I think it was, we met with the
11 deputy mayor Maria Torres-Springer and her staff.
12 We're meeting with them regularly. I don't think
13 that ever happened in previous administrations.
14 There is a level of serious engagement and back and
15 forth.

16 Yesterday, the topic of asylum seekers came up
17 and we were all right on. Do we have the right
18 mappings of where the where the populations are?
19 Where our branches are? Let's do... go to the next
20 level of coordinating, going from the branch to where
21 those folks are. Making sure that they... You know,
22 people come from countries where they didn't have
23 public libraries. They didn't understand, "What it's
24 free? And you... you won't ask for my papers you
25 won't turn me in?" I mean, these are all essential

1 items. And again, I think that the administration
2 really recognizes us as... as a partner in this
3 and... and in so much more, and have really stepped
4 up in a seriousness of conversation that I just...
5 With all the issues they face, the budget choices, I
6 want to give a shout out to on that side as well.

8 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And are you collecting data in
9 terms of these folks that are coming in on... because
10 of this migrant crisis? I think that's so important
11 for everyone to know that.

12 MR. BURON: Yes and no. Yes and no. So of
13 course, we want to, you know... we want to show how
14 busy we are. That's how we show how important we
15 are, is with the services that we're providing.

16 But one of the reasons that we are so known to
17 the immigrant community, who otherwise, as Tony just
18 said, who might not trust civic institutions, where
19 they're from, is that we don't ask for this
20 information when they come in. We say welcome. We
21 say we're glad that you're here.

22 PRESIDENT MARX: In multiple languages.

23 MR. BURON: Yeah. In multiple languages. Do you
24 know how folks find out? They find out from their
25 neighbors and their friends. And they find out and

1
2 certainly with the city as well, who says go here for
3 IDNYC. But really, it's at this point, we have such
4 a reputation within communities, and even
5 internationally, that people know when you come to
6 New York, you want free libraries... free service,
7 and free English classes, and helpful people to help
8 you and trusted individuals to help you who will not
9 ask you all these questions to scare you away? You
10 go to the public library.

11 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I mean, that's amazing. I
12 mean, as someone that obviously works for the city,
13 and has felt that pressure across our five boroughs
14 of this migrant crisis: We haven't been given many
15 resources from the federal and state government in
16 terms of how to handle it. You know, could obviously
17 be handled better, but it is a little bit of a mess.
18 But to hear that your three systems are really at the
19 forefront of supporting this crisis in the ways that
20 you are is... is fantastic. Which, you know, I'll
21 segue into a question which I already know the answer
22 of, but... but how will these pegs impact the
23 staffing of those of staffers that, you know, speak
24 these languages and are able to provide support for
25

1 these migrants that are coming to... to these...
2 these libraries?

3
4 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Well, you know, as I
5 mentioned earlier, if you cut hours, you reduce the
6 number of hours a day that we're really there to
7 give, get you signed up for an IDNYC card to get you,
8 you know, the information you need about schools and
9 housing and everything else.

10 So in addition to sort of content of what you're
11 offering to these families, you're actually cutting
12 the... the number of... right, the contact... that
13 number of people we are able to process on any given
14 day. It's really devastating.

15 MR. BURON: It's less outreach. It's less
16 English language classes. It's less support. That's
17 what it is. And less means less people are served.
18 And those are real people. So this isn't just
19 numbers for us. You know... we see that... we know
20 that every one of these numbers is a person walking
21 in that door that has a need. It is an incredible
22 thing when someone comes in. We take it very
23 seriously. People come into our library all the
24 time, and they say to us, "I need help. Can you help
25 me?" And our answer is, "Yes."

1
2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And the admin knows this?

3 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Sure.

4 Speaking about our children... our migrant
5 children. Has... Have the three systems been
6 collaborating with the Department of Education in
7 terms of supporting new students that are going into
8 these systems?

9 PRESIDENT MARX: We... The three systems met with
10 the Chancellor and all the Deputy Chancellors most
11 recently -- I think it was two weeks ago?, last
12 week?, two weeks ago? -- and we are reviewing every
13 practice and looking for every opportunity to
14 collaborate. I think we all understand that we have
15 to do... We all have to lend the shoulder to whatever
16 improvements we can have into supporting the amazing
17 teachers in New York and the students in New York.
18 And the libraries are the key partner. My Libraries
19 NYC was established now more than a decade ago, so
20 that we could provide circulating library collections
21 into schools. Now we're talking to the schools about
22 their civics, the topic of today, of their civics
23 curriculum and how we can provide documents and, and
24 help to make that work. I mean, we are... we are
25 eager and grateful to work with the Chancellor and

1
2 his colleagues in every way we can, and some of us
3 even come back from those backgrounds.

4 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I want to turn to
5 Councilmember Joseph for some questions.

6 COUNCILMEMBER JOSEPH: Sure. Thank you, Chair.
7 Thank you so much for the work that you do. As the
8 Ed Chair, and prior to getting into the Council, I
9 was still teaching, and I have to say this on the
10 record and how you came in and you were a lifeline to
11 our communities, especially our students facing
12 digital divide, you came in, and you plugged in those
13 holes when our students did not have broadband to get
14 on Google... Google Classroom. I thank you on behalf
15 of New York City educators, and also myself as an
16 educator... a forever educator, 22 years in, I thank
17 you.

18 We cannot... I'm sitting here and I'm thinking,
19 we cannot afford to cut a dime from New York City
20 public libraries, because you are the lifeline to so
21 many. You go into so many areas, whether it's our
22 teens, our seniors, in all of those aspects, jobs,
23 ESL programming. And even at one point, you were
24 doing food distribution. The libraries were not
25

1 built for that, but you pivoted when we needed it the
2 most. So I thank you for that.

3
4 I just wanted to find out: During the pandemic
5 you came, you served New York City public students
6 with even laptops, and even broadband. Most people
7 probably didn't know that. Has the relationships
8 after the pandemic maintained with the public schools
9 and the DOES to continue to serve students that may
10 still face the lack of digital... tablets, devices,
11 or broadband?

12 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: The short answer is yes. And
13 the more nuanced response is that everything that
14 we're doing on the digital front with respect to
15 digital literacy is designed, obviously, with
16 students in mind. But frankly, with... with everyone
17 in mind. And some... one of the things we've been
18 working on is figuring out how the programs for
19 students also can help our older adults who... who
20 need to be connected. And a lot of the work that we
21 did during the pandemic could be looked at as band
22 aids... as ways to solve problems for individuals.
23 But those individuals... those kids were only in the
24 third grade one time. And they needed that. And...
25 and at the same time now that we've emerged, we're

1 trying to, you know, shine a light on these issues to
2 make sure that, that we address the issue of
3 connectivity in a way that's lasting. That's not,
4 you know, sort of the one at a time... the extending
5 the signal out from every building. It's not... it's
6 not the library's job to do that. But it was the
7 library's ability to do that that made life so much
8 better for the students of the city of New York.

10 MR. BURON: You know, one of the things that we
11 dedicated ourselves at the library during the
12 pandemic was to come out stronger, and to be able to
13 continue things that we learned that worked well, and
14 some things that we tried that didn't work well.

15 And making sure that we had a supply of hotspots
16 available so that people could get connected that to
17 make sure that we get more online resources, such as
18 more homework help resources, for longer extended
19 hours, so that young people who are in school who
20 might be having trouble, are able to... you know,
21 are able to access, you know, a knowledgeable person
22 to help them with their homework. We would like to
23 have more homework help assistance after school.
24 That's... that's an ask. That's a priority of ours.
25 And that's something that we would like as well to be

1
2 able to do more of. And so that works well. We know
3 that young people really liked that in-person
4 assistance. And so we want to make sure that we are
5 there after school every day to provide that help.

6 COUNCILMEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you. Is digital
7 literacy going to be one of the things that you...
8 the library provides in terms of our seniors. Not
9 only did we see our young people struggle with
10 digital divide, so did our seniors, when it came down
11 to registering for vaccination, when centers closed,
12 these are the things that I was seeing on the ground?

13 PRESIDENT MARX: So the answer is... the answer
14 is yes, absolutely. I mean, I think, in an
15 emergency, because we are in every neighborhood,
16 because we're trusted, because our amazing staff were
17 there, right?, physically there, we could offer the
18 band aids and the emergency solutions. You know, the
19 mayor came to describe us as a Swiss Army knife about
20 a certain type of... everything that you need. And I
21 think that's important.

22 But I also I do want to reiterate, let's not pat
23 ourselves... let's not think band aids are solutions.
24 They are band aids. We need systemic solutions. The
25 idea that there are millions of New Yorkers... New

1
2 Yorkers outside the digital... without broadband at
3 home. Like it is... like mind boggling. It's beyond
4 mind boggling. It's outrageous. And we can do
5 hotspots, and we're all trying various things. We
6 are investing again in citizens band radio to see if
7 that can be part of a literally a sort of public
8 utility notion of... of how to provide broadband at a
9 basic level. We're working with... through our
10 center for educators and schools, how do we get stuff
11 systemically into the curriculum, primary documents,
12 the after schools, or systemic approaches. We need
13 to invest in those system approaches, because
14 otherwise, we'll just keep doing band aids and the
15 band aids are expensive and don't work in the end.
16 They don't solve the problem.

17 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So in case no one knows this,
18 you know, we are the largest providers of free Wi Fi
19 in the city.

20 PRESIDENT MARX: And in skills string as well.

21 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah. But the point is that
22 this is a problem that we've witnessed for a long
23 time. You know, pre pandemic, if I were to say to
24 somebody that 30% of the households in Brooklyn
25 didn't have Wi Fi, they would, they would be like,

1 "What?" And it didn't stay with them, because the
2 people in our worlds are on an offline all day long.
3 I think the pandemic actually did serve to shine a
4 light on this issue. People now understood more
5 deeply what it was like if you were on the wrong side
6 of the digital divide, if you couldn't educate your
7 children, if you couldn't apply for benefits of one
8 sort or another. So there's now an understanding, or
9 at least a better awareness of the issues.
10

11 And so now really is the time that we need to fix
12 these problems in a more comprehensive way. And to
13 the extent that the library can be part of that, and
14 part of the... and part of this awareness campaign,
15 we're here and ready. And we have standing, actually
16 to make the case.

17 MR. BURON: You know, what's interesting is that
18 our older adults and our homebound were some of the
19 best users of our virtual... virtual programs and
20 virtual classes that we had during the pandemic. And
21 so coming out of that, we can't abandon that new
22 priority. And that's the thing. You know, I
23 personally have been with the library for 29 years.
24 We're doing more than we've ever done before. Yeah,
25 I know.

[laughter]

But I've never seen the library do more in so many various areas. And it just... The priorities just keep mounting. And we are here to accept that. We're not here to say, take... take these priorities away from us and give it to somebody else. We want this. But we absolutely need the resources to make this happen.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So not to beat a dead horse, but we came out of... or as we're coming out of the pandemic, having built a much, much more robust digital enterprise, and realizing, you know, unquestionably, that we need to continue that work, that it is our future, and that it's a vital part of what we're doing. But at the same time, that we can't abandon the traditional library services. And so we're trying all of us to figure out how to continue to maintain both the digital and the traditional services that we offer, at the same time hearing from the city that actually we're not going to have as much money to do it. And that's, I think, all the other stuff is interesting and right. But that's really at the core of what's going on here.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Of course. So moving on to
3 more civic engagement questions. You know, we just
4 went through another long election cycle. What
5 efforts by the libraries supported voting in this
6 last voting election... voting season... this last
7 month's election?

8 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I'll start with that.
9 Everybody... Everybody can chime in. We all... We
10 all do quite a lot. In Brooklyn, 18 of our libraries
11 become polling sites. That's the most, you know,
12 tangible thing. But all... We're registering people
13 to vote. We're we have a whole civic... civics
14 Commons, which is designed to make sure that our
15 citizenry is well educated about elections, about
16 their role and responsibilities as people who live in
17 a democracy. It is... Civic literacy is one of the
18 most important things that we do, and we do it all
19 year long, and... but never more than during an
20 election season.

21 And we also encourage elected officials to come
22 and use library branches as a way to... as a place to
23 engage with citizens, as a place to make them aware
24 of what the issues are and how particular elected
25

1 officials and candidates are looking at the issues
2 and trying to solve them.

3
4 PRESIDENT MARX: You'll find our numbers again in
5 the testimony. Amongst them, over 4000 participants
6 in 335 Civic focused programs. We held 25 voter
7 registration events at 22 branches and 35 voter
8 education events at 21 branches. Again, highlighting
9 the neighborhoods with the least resources and often
10 the least civic engagement or voter turnout.

11 There are a set of programs that we do as Tri-Li.
12 We work with the League of Women's Voters, as well as
13 we have a particular focus in Staten Island at this
14 point.

15 But again, I'll just back up and say, everything
16 we do is about empowering and informing the citizenry
17 across the board. And no one else is focused on
18 doing that in the pockets of the population, that are
19 the least resourced, and are participating the least,
20 and getting the least as a result. And those...
21 We're in those neighborhoods, and helping those
22 folks. There is more that we can do. Again, we...
23 we'd love to be having more training than we are,
24 more voter programs. We'd like to help neighborhoods
25 figure out how they can mobilize themselves around

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2 local problems and get the kinds of responses that
3 the city council and the administration want to be
4 able to give an interlocutor with their neighbors,
5 with our communities.

6 There is... Because democracy is strained, if not
7 under threat, at this point, nationally, globally,
8 New York can... can and must demonstrate the
9 alternative that we can make and do make democracy
10 work here in this city. That's not a small task, but
11 we're... we're sort of front and center for it.

12 MR. BURON: You know, the numbers... As Tony
13 said, the numbers are in the testimony about, you
14 know how many libraries were used for early voting,
15 for voting sites, again, more than ever before.

16 So more than ever before people are coming to the
17 libraries to vote in New York City, at their local
18 library. And again, it's an opportunity for people
19 who otherwise might not come to the library to be
20 able to see what's offered.

21 But I just wanted to, you know, as you, you heard
22 from Tony and Linda about the importance. I'm just
23 going to take a step back and say: Our help with the
24 census that we did increased the voter rolls, because
25 we were able to count more people.

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2 You know, the library was very instrumental in
3 working with the city and working with the government
4 to... to make sure everyone was counted. Because
5 unless you are initially counted, then you cannot be
6 represented adequately. And so yet again, this is
7 just part of a continuum of what we are doing to make
8 sure that everyone counts.

9 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And you all shared how your
10 branches have hosted multiple civic engagement
11 events. At those events, do you teach things like
12 rank-choice voting or ballot proposals?

13 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Awesome. That's great.

15 How have libraries helped to increase voter
16 engagement amongst communities where turnout can be
17 tricky? With BIPOC voters, NYCHA residents, young
18 voters, Gen Z voters, immigrant voters, or new
19 citizens?

20 PRESIDENT MARX: I think... look, again, the
21 reality is we all painfully aware... or should be
22 painfully aware are that it is in the least resourced
23 neighborhoods, that folks are not finding the
24 educational opportunities that they need, that they
25 are not finding the progress in terms of their, you

1 know, the economic opportunities they want, as well
2 as learning opportunities. Those neighborhoods tend
3 to use digital less partly because of the broadband
4 problem, which is a structural problem. Not... they
5 are no faulty. They just don't have those tools,

6
7 So we have to actually sort of double down in our
8 outreach in those neighborhoods, in all these fronts,
9 and including voter. In a sense, because we're the
10 only ones in those neighborhoods, doubling down on
11 all the skills, all the... all the seminars, all the
12 discussions, all the educational programs, those are
13 all designed to energize and give agency to those
14 citizens who either don't feel it, or don't see it,
15 or don't think that they have the wherewithal or the
16 right to it. And we're the ones who are there to...
17 to argue against and give them the resources.

18 And that's part of what democracy needs at this
19 point, and were essential for it.

20 MR. BURON: And you said yourself Chair, you
21 know, we are in over 200 neighborhoods. So we are
22 the central location of every neighborhood. We are
23 the center of community in every neighborhood. So
24 when I was talking about our trainings, for example
25 that we do on Tuesdays: During election time our

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2 training is how do we train our staff, you know, on
3 the front lines to be able to engage with our
4 customers who come in, but also who do not come in,
5 to do the outreach to get them to get the information
6 to them as well. And that's part of our mission as
7 well.

8 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: We're actually a targeting...
9 We're actually targeting neighborhoods that have
10 historically been low turnout, in particular,
11 Bushwick, Coney Island, Brownsville, Bed Stuy, and
12 we're working with community based organizations to
13 provide workshops in languages other than English to
14 make sure that people can understand how to do it and
15 the importance of being engaged.

16 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I also do want to shout you
17 guys out for... you know, I tend to all of our
18 community board general meetings, and Nicole Bryant
19 from, you know, our Macomb Public Library branches at
20 every single community board meeting with a
21 presentation of what the library is doing for the
22 month. So it's just really amazing to see how
23 engaged our libraries are in my community.

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2 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you. I appreciate
3 that. And, in fact, Macomb, as you know, is a
4 polling site.

5 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: I have one more question,
6 because you all have been extremely efficient in your
7 testimonies, as well as you know, throughout the
8 questioning, as you always are. But do you receive
9 support or coordinate with any other city agencies,
10 in doing the outreach in regards to your civic
11 programs?

12 PRESIDENT MARX: I don't have a list right in
13 front of me, Mr. Chair. We're happy to get it to
14 you. But we find allies and support across the
15 board. I mean, I think we all let's be let's be
16 clear:

17 I think there is so much consensus in this city,
18 and the administration, and the city council about
19 what needs to be done and where we need to invest it.
20 Yes, we face particular economic uncertainties, but
21 the administration is trying to adjust to those. But
22 I would say actually, you know, it's astonishing the
23 partnerships that we have with nonprofits, with the
24 City Council, with the administration, with the OMB
25 that are right on top of it all the time. Yes, we

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2 all have challenges, and we all have hard decisions
3 to make, which is why democracy... to air those and
4 discuss them is so important, and why we welcome this
5 opportunity, because we know if people understand
6 better, if people recognize, pay attention to what
7 sort of is taken for granted, coming from libraries,
8 then everyone will understand why that needs to not
9 just be protected, but built upon in terms of the
10 bang for the buck, to use Linda's phrase.

11 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Elegant, huh?

12 PRESIDENT MARX: Elegant. Yeah. The... You
13 know, and I think the part that... the sense of
14 understanding and appreciation and mutual support of
15 that, with the council, with the administration, with
16 OMB, with all of our neighborhood partners, is
17 palpable. We just need to continue to make it real.

18 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I'm sitting here thinking
19 about all the agencies that we partner with, you
20 know, whether it's the board of elections or the
21 Department of Health during the pandemic. I can't
22 think of a time in 29 years... but it's been a long
23 time. I can't think of a time when we ever said to
24 the city administration or to a particular agency.
25 "No, I'm sorry, we can't do that with you."

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2 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: And without further ado, I
3 thank you all for testifying today and for providing
4 great responses to the questions that we had for you.

5 We'll turn it over to public testimony. Great.
6 Thank you.

7 PRESIDENT MARX: Thank you.

8 PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

9 MR. BURON: Thank you very much, Chair.

10 MS. SEXTON: Hello?

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hi. Thank you, Ms. Sexton.
12 We'll just wait one moment. We'll be switching to
13 public testimony in one moment.

14 And our next panel of public testimony will be a
15 zoom panel.

16 The witness is Lucy Sexton. Before we close the
17 hearing after our first public panel, we will check
18 for anyone we inadvertently missed for the record.
19 We're just transitioning it will be one moment.

20 We'll be moving to public testimony and our
21 witness Lucy Sexton in several in just one minute

22 Miss Sexton Are you ready to testify as well?

23 MS. SEXTON: Sure, can you hear me?

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We can. So at this point we
25 will move to public testimony. As a reminder, there

1
2 is a two minute clock. You may begin your testimony
3 when ready.

4 MS. SEXTON: Hi, everybody coming to you from the
5 Long Island Expressway, heading out to Flushing town
6 hall.

7 My name is Lucy Sexton. I'm with New Yorkers for
8 Cultural and Arts, which is a coalition of more than
9 300 cultural organizations and cultural workers from
10 across the five boroughs. And I'm here, I'm speaking
11 off my remarks, but I did email the remarks to
12 everyone. I'm here in support of the two Intros:
13 One calling for an end to the Jones Act, and the
14 other calling for an end to the contract with Luma in
15 Puerto Rico.

16 I was really, really honored to go to San Juan
17 last month and to produce an event with the Caribbean
18 Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute and the
19 San Juan organization Tire[sp?] Comunidad
20 Lagueco[sp?]. And we held an event where we brought
21 together local San Juan cultural centers and cultural
22 leaders to discuss what had been happening since
23 Hurricane Fiona, to talk about the services that they
24 were providing to their community, including

(speaking of Wi FI) Wi Fi, and power, and food, and
in some cases, shelter.

And it was... The topic of the discussion that
we put together was called the role of the artist is
to make revolution irresistible. And it was about
the fact that you cannot continue to serve your
culture, serve your community, without addressing the
things that are... are oppressing people... that are
oppressing your community, and the need to engage a
political... on a political level, and I really
salute the council (inaudible) those Intros to speak
out about... in support of Puerto Rico.

I was very happy that the Commissioner of the
Department of Cultural Affairs Laurie Cumbo came to
the event. She engaged with local leaders and with
New York City leaders who were there. I'm really,
really proud of our New York cultural community in
that we were able in two weeks to raise \$20,000 from
artists, from small cultural groups, from the CIG. A
lot of members of the Cultural Institutions Group, as
well as from the lobbying firms that work for culture
in New York, the Wright group, Cozen O'Connor, Park
and K. And we used it to put on the event... a small
amount of it to put on the event. And then we

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2 donated most of it to the four cultural organizations
3 that were part of the event in San Juan.

4 So it is... it is part and parcel of creating
5 connection between New York and Puerto Rico. It has
6 been a long connection with artists and families and
7 workers moving back and forth. Certainly my entire
8 life between New York and Puerto Rico. You know, New
9 York culture is Puerto Rican culture. And culture is
10 community is politics. So I really encourage the
11 city council to support these intros to send a
12 message to our federal government that it is time to
13 stop extracting wealth and oppressing Puerto Rico,
14 and let Puerto Rico continue to thrive as an economy,
15 as a community, as a culture. Thank you for letting
16 me testify.

17 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much, Miss
19 Sexton. And with that, and that concludes this panel
20 and the public testimony portion. If there is anyone
21 that we inadvertently missed, please let us know
22 using the raise hand function and zoom or if there's
23 anyone in the room, please let us know.

24

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2 I'm also going to read the names of witnesses
3 that were registered for the record in case they're
4 here: Priscilla Grimm, and Christian Maldonado.

5 We do not see any hands or anyone in the room.

6 We do not see anyone on Zoom, raising a hand.

7 Okay, and that concludes the public testimony.

8 Just one moment we're just checking. That concludes
9 the public testimony portion of this hearing.

10 Chair Ossé?

11 CHAIRPERSON OSSÉ: Thank you so much, Brenda, and
12 without further ado, I will adjourn today's hearing.

13 [GAVEL]

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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 12/12/2022