



New York City Council Oversight Hearing

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

“How Libraries Empower New Yorkers to Become Informed Voters and Engaged Citizens.”

September 25, 2024

Good morning, my name is Dr. Brandy McNeil and I am the Deputy Director of Branch Programs and Services at the New York Public Library (NYPL). I would like to thank City Council Speaker Adams, Chair Rivera, and the members of the committee for the opportunity to testify this morning on “How Libraries Empower New Yorkers to Become Informed Voters and Engaged Citizens.”

As trusted nonpartisan institutions, public libraries play a vital role in supporting a healthy democracy. Libraries provide access to resources, knowledge, and spaces that empower individuals to become active participants in their communities. With the rise of book bans across the country and the proliferation of misinformation, this work has become more important than ever. The Library’s efforts to inform voters and engage citizens are guided by three pillars: civic knowledge, civic attitudes, and civic actions. These pillars set the parameters for our efforts to promote equitable access to information for voters across the neighborhoods we serve and innovative civic programming.

At the heart of democracy is our responsibility as citizens to participate in the political process at all levels of government. But according to the NYC Campaign Finance Board (CFB), voter



turnout in New York City is only 60.8% for presidential elections. These numbers are even lower in local elections, with only 29.6% of eligible voters participating in mayoral elections, and drops further within low-income neighborhoods, communities of color, youth, older adults, and voters with disabilities. As an institution with 88 neighborhood locations across the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island, the Library is positioned to engage its patrons and local communities in the electoral process through public programs and outreach that encourage participation and equip New Yorkers with the tools and knowledge they need to make informed decisions.

During the June 2021 primaries which first introduced Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), and as part of the GoVoteNYC initiative, the three New York City library systems introduced a number of voter education and civic engagement programs and outreach efforts that included RCV training sessions and panel discussions that targeted low turnout segments of the electorate. Voting engagement events leading up to and amid the primaries were coordinated with the help of our co-sponsors and community partners at Queens Public Library, Brooklyn Public Library, the Campaign Finance Board (CFB), the Hispanic Federation, Gothamist, and Citizens Union, among others. Since then, NYPL has maintained its partnership with CFB's NYC Votes initiative to host virtual training events to prepare voters for local elections and to share voting resources like "NYC Votes" print materials and digital toolkits.

From September 2023 to July 2024, NYPL held eight voter-focused events with civic partners like the League of Women Voters. These events included voting 101 trainings that covered ballot proposals and panel discussions on voter engagement. NYPL also coordinated with the NYC Board of Elections to distribute close to 10,000 voter registration forms in branches for the 2023 November elections. Ahead of this year's general election, CFB's NYC Votes will hold a



voter mobilization training for library staff in October that will cover voter registration and best practices to inspire voter engagement. These trainings are a valuable resource for the offerings and conversations that our branch staff have with eligible voters. Branches like the Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library are also hosting important conversations with disabilities activists about the barriers to voting faced by people with disabilities and how New Yorkers can make a difference. This year, both National Voter Registration Day and Constitution Day fell on September 17, creating a fortuitous opportunity to share voting resources and materials from our collections, including a handwritten copy of the first draft of the Bill of Rights and a book list covering subjects from the ratification of the constitution to the enfranchisement of African Americans and women. All open branches across the system distributed voter registration forms and promoted online voter registration using multilingual signs in Spanish, Chinese, Bangla, Arabic, and Russian to help close language barriers and provide access to computers and wireless internet service. In the digital space, our voter information pages provide information about voting requirements, how to research election issues using the Library's resources, and voting for teens just to name a few.

Beyond programs and initiatives targeting voter engagement, are a host of services, campaigns, and offerings that focus on citizenship and civic engagement more broadly. In FY24, 481 programs with 6,780 participants were held to engage communities with civics through conversation and learning. These programs covered topics such as everyday civics, activism, "NYC Government 101," and citizenship study groups. In April 2023, NYPL launched the Innovation Lab, an initiative that expands our support for staff innovation, encourages experimentation at the Library, and celebrates staff ingenuity and creativity. Our first innovation challenge for FY24 focused on civics and civic action, building on our existing strengths to



encourage democratic participation. As a result, branches have held programs like free spanish citizenship application help and a civic festival where patrons learned about civics and how local government shapes public policy to programs that promote free access to citizenship applications.

One of the most indispensable components of our work to engage citizens is the preservation of the freedom to read and access to books for all. While equitable access to information has always been essential to NYPL's mission, it has become increasingly vital to the survival of our democracy, which is currently being threatened by book bans across the country. Books educate people about the world around them; they invite discussion and dialogue, and challenge readers to consider different worldviews and perspectives. One of the most alarming aspects of recent book bans is that the overwhelming majority of the titles being challenged center the experiences of marginalized communities, in particular LGBTQ+ Americans and people of color. These book bans are often a feature of a larger context of efforts to explicitly ban or even criminalize the teaching of such topics as race, gender, and the identities of LGBTQ+ people. The censorship of these topics keeps marginalized communities from seeing themselves represented in our country's literature and culture. We know from history, for example, how important the voices of those most marginalized were to the advancement of voting and civil rights. Perhaps most importantly, these bans deprive others of the opportunity to learn and empathize with their experience. This time last year, in response to the alarming rise of book bans and challenges throughout the country, we launched "Books for All" to underscore the importance of reading and access to knowledge for all, and the vital role that public libraries play in our democracy. The campaign made banned titles free for readers nationwide to borrow through SimplyE, our free e-reader app. It had a major focus on teen youth and engagement, in



recognition of the fact that the majority of books currently being banned or challenged are young adult books.

This week, in coordination with “Banned Books Week” and as part of our continued commitment to protect the freedom to read, we kicked off our annual Teen Banned Book Club. The Teen Banned Book Club shines a spotlight on young adult titles that have been the subject of bans or challenges. Free copies of this year’s book club pick will be available for teens at their local branch and to NYPL cardholders on Libby, accompanied by a discussion guide and culminating in an online author talk led by teens. We also launched an online exhibition that explores censorship in the United States through four themed sections: Literature and Film, Sexual and Reproductive Freedom, Archiving Against Censorship, and White Supremacy, and War, Colonialism and Protest. The exhibit will be accompanied by a curriculum guide and temporary displays of material in the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building. On October 19, the New York, Brooklyn, and Queens Public Libraries in partnership with the American Library Association, their United Against Book Bans campaign, and the Association for Rural and Small Libraries, will organize a first-of-its-kind “Freedom to Read” national day of action to unite against book bans. NYPL will hold a rally at the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, share information about the freedom to read with patrons at tabling events across the system, and take to social media to share more information about book bans taking place across the country.

As noted previously, young New Yorkers are a segment of the population with particularly low voter turnout rates. This is why NYPL launched Teen Civic Ambassadors (TCAs), a program that offers paid internships for teens to help develop job readiness and leadership skills, with a focus on library resources, civics, and peer-to-peer engagement. As community hubs, and “third



places” for teens outside school and the home, libraries coordinate teen-led programs focused on building civic knowledge for our youngest eligible voters. In spring 2024, NYPL’s TCAs worked across 16 branches in low-income neighborhoods and offered over 50 programs serving over 250 teens. Teens hosted programs on a range of topics from women’s history to art programs focused on supporting mental wellbeing. This past summer, in partnership with NYC Votes, the Library’s inaugural Teen Civics Ambassadors summer cohort held 15 voter registration drives and created programs focused on how to involve their peers in community issues. The TCAs also facilitated an immersive and thoughtful panel discussion with local city council members on the importance of civic action and ways to effect change. Our teens were able to learn directly from council members representing the most diverse city council in New York’s history. We want to thank you again, Chair Rivera, for participating in that panel, and we want to thank the City Council for their support through the years, which has been integral to our ability to innovate these programs that speak directly to the city’s youth.

The Library’s Center for Schools and Educators (CES) brings civics to life for school librarians, educators, and students by teaching them to conduct civics research using NYPL databases, resources, and using the Library’s primary sources to create civics-forward guides on subjects like Black New Yorkers Commemorating Emancipation, Jewish Activism and Housing Reform, and Censorship and the Freedom to Read in the 20th Century. CES also offers free field trips to the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, featuring the Polonsky Exhibition of the New York Public Library’s Treasures, and workshops for educators to build their knowledge and understanding of civics themes and how to bring them into the classroom. This fall we’re hosting civics workshops for educators to help them teach their students how to use Library’s resources to conduct



historical and contemporary research on housing activism and regulation, aligned with NYC Public School's new Seal of Civic Readiness.

Our recent work to inform voters and engage citizens is supplemented by longtime initiatives such as offering our branches as polling sites. Four of our libraries will serve as voting locations in the upcoming November election (53rd St, Richmondtown, Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library, Andrew Heiskell). We also continue to play a role in participatory budgeting processes with the City Council and the Civic Engagement Commission. The Library not only submits potential projects of its own for these initiatives, but serves as a safe space for New Yorkers to generate and discuss ideas and ultimately cast votes for their projects of choice.

Libraries are increasingly one of the only institutions that remain trusted by a wide range of New Yorkers. Our principled commitment to our mission makes our branches safe spaces where everyone is entitled to the same right to information, knowledge, and the opportunity to grow. We have built on this trust to establish our pillars of civic knowledge, civic attitudes, and civic action to ultimately inform voters and engage citizens. We are grateful for your support for these initiatives, which have taken on a consequential role within the survival of our democracy.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I remain available to answer any questions you have.

Statement by Scott McLeod, Director of Civic Engagement, Queens Public Library

**New York City Council's Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
International Intergroup Relations – Oversight: How Libraries Empower New Yorkers to
Become Informed Voters and Engaged Citizens**

September 25, 2024

Good morning. I am Scott McLeod, Director of Civic Engagement at Queens Public Library (QPL). On behalf of our President & CEO Dennis M. Walcott, thank you, Chair Rivera and the members of this Committee, for the opportunity to testify about the key role libraries play in engaging and empowering the residents of New York City.

Public libraries are the last truly democratic institution. Regardless of circumstance or background, anyone can visit our buildings and digital platforms to access the information and resources they need to grow, learn and improve their lives. That is why we are tremendously thankful for the restoration and baselining of our operational funds in this year's budget. Your incredible support allows Queens Public Library to continue offering reliable, free and open spaces throughout the borough, at minimum six days a week.

This week is Banned Books Week, an especially poignant moment as attempts to limit expression and silence marginalized viewpoints continue at unprecedented levels at libraries across the nation. Queens Public Library is dedicated to protecting the freedom to read, ensuring unrestricted access to diverse perspectives and learning free from censorship throughout the year. This week, our efforts spotlighting this critical issue include a Banned Books Movie Festival, storytimes, a book giveaway, teen programs, and making a selection of banned books available in our digital collections to our users with no waits. Additionally, the Library has launched a Banned Books Library Card design contest where the winning artwork will be featured on a special edition QPL card.

Our libraries help ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate fully in our democracy. Our customers know if they need trustworthy resources, they just need to go to their closest QPL location. As discourse in the country has become increasingly divided and politicized, QPL remains the steady force in ensuring New Yorkers are educated about government and the issues facing society. Working closely with the City's Campaign Finance Board's NYC Votes, the Library distributes candidate information guides and educational literature ahead of both primary and general elections. The Library creates special blog posts that provide an overview of what voters should expect, including the offices being sought, ballot measures, and useful links. This information is also amplified via email and social media to reach as many people as possible. Ultimately, we want our customers to be able to make informed decisions when they enter the voting booth.

Queens Public Library annually participates in National Voter Registration Day (NVRD) to raise awareness of the November general election and to encourage people to register to vote in time for Election Day. Last week, we continued this tradition by having voter registration forms, one-pagers on how to complete the form, and absentee ballot request forms readily available to the public. Ahead of September 17, our public service staff is educated and prepared to answer questions from the public, whether it is about the registration deadline or how they can find their polling site for the upcoming election. Critical to NVRD and leading up to the registration deadline are collaborations with community-based organizations (CBOs) that are also committed to conducting non-partisan efforts. Over the years, QPL has worked with NYC Votes, the League of Women Voters, Woodside on the Move, and many other groups on NVRD actions.

As centers of community in every neighborhood, libraries are natural voting locations. QPL has a longstanding relationship with the Board of Elections (BOE) to allow our buildings to serve this important purpose. This past primary, 11 libraries welcomed Queens residents to vote, and three were early voting sites. We look forward to continuing this partnership with the BOE in November to help individuals seeking to exercise their right to vote in a known and trusted environment.

A vibrant democratic society requires a well-informed citizenry with access to unbiased and undistorted information, which is becoming increasingly challenging in a social media-dominated world. In 2021, the entire city was preparing for the implementation of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), including for the offices of the Mayor, Comptroller, Public Advocate, as well as Council Members. With the advent of RCV in Queens and the likelihood of confusion and misconceptions circulating about the new method, it was imperative that we educate the public and reinforce the facts. Similar to our election lead-up efforts, QPL developed web content outlining the process, its background, the applicable offices, and resources to learn about RCV. Ahead of the special election first using RCV, QPL President Dennis Walcott led a virtual discussion with Rank the Vote NYC and CBOs with deep ties to communities in the borough. The conversation had more than 1,200 live and post-live views and is still available to anyone who is interested.

The same year, QPL, along with BPL and NYPL, were proud recipients of a GoVoteNYC grant to assist with public education and outreach for the June primary and November general election. Together, we sponsored a series of four RCV virtual sessions in Mandarin, Cantonese, Bengali, Spanish and Haitian-Creole. We also jointly hosted programs that prompted attendees to consider how voting has long-term consequences in regard to local issues. A session with QPL's Queens Memory Project on "NYC Flood Resiliency: Ask the Experts" involved a dynamic discussion about flood resiliency in the city, including history, policy and neighborhood level actions. The topic was especially poignant since Hurricane Ida had impacted many Queens residents the prior month.

Crucial to our voter education outreach is connecting with Queens' most vulnerable populations. The Library's Integrated English Literacy & Civics Education (IELCE) classes incorporate topics ranging from the history of the United States, citizen rights and responsibilities, Election Day, holidays and their significance, voter registration, mock conversations with polling site officials, and more. Through QPL's partnership with the Mayor's Office on Immigrant Affairs, we are able to expand our reach by offering We Speak NYC, an English Language Learning program that features civic-focused instruction. Since beginning to offer this in the Spring, QPL has served 868 students. The overall need for ESOL programming in the borough is overwhelming. We offer ESOL classes at 22 of our branches and at our seven Adult Learning Centers, serving almost 4,400 people a year. At any given time, we have a system-wide waiting list of approximately 2,000 people, with half from our Flushing library.

As part of our efforts at Rikers Correctional Facility, we work with a broader coalition to encourage participation in the voting process. QPL supports this initiative by distributing voting resources during our routine library service, as well as by creating content for candidate and voter guides that supplement NYC Votes materials and adhere to the facility's approved guidelines ahead of the election.

The Library's teen centers are essential spaces for our young adult users to freely express themselves and develop their interests. Earlier this year, our Central and Long Island City teen centers partnered with NYC Votes to host Civics for All, a student-focused training on the basics of civic engagement and voter registration. Ahead of the upcoming election, the teen center at our Cambria Heights Library is offering a teen civic education series to help build a foundation of understanding government, the significance of being involved with one's community, and more. The first session, called "Mythbusters: Political Parties," examined the political party system in the United States and offered a chance for

teens to see where their ideologies most closely align. In the following session, they will be provided the opportunity to register to vote.

Our libraries also serve as trusted, accessible hubs for community convening and civic engagement. We have instituted service-learning initiatives, in which individuals not only engage in meaningful service experiences but also in reflection that leads to greater understanding of their ability to have an impact on their community. For example, World of Work for Teens, which received an Urban Libraries Council Top Innovation Award, combines college coursework and professional development workshops while engaging teens in service projects, and our Talking Period initiative prepares young people to be menstrual equity advocates and community champions.

In addition, Queens Public Library hosts online Community Engagement and Leadership workshops to equip residents with information and resources to help them prepare to assume roles in city government, civic groups, and community organizations. The sessions have trained more than 500 and reached participants in the United States, Europe, and Australia. Our workshops, forums, and resources focus on building leadership capacity, address topical issues such as the child welfare system in New York City, and provide media training to develop skills such as executive presence and communications.

Since 2022, Queens Public Library has partnered with Food Bank for New York City, the city's largest hunger relief organization, to address food insecurity by conducting Mobile Food Pantry Distributions with Library volunteers and staff at branches across the borough. Over the past two years, we have served 5,700 households and reached nearly 28,500 people so far.

Throughout the year, QPL staff and our government and community partners leverage our spaces to empower customers as well-informed citizens through public resource tabling and informational workshops. The Library works closely with the New York City Civic Engagement Commission to support The People's Money through community outreach and awareness. Last year, at 23 QPL locations across the borough, residents voted on how to spend taxpayer money, and this year, we conducted a digital campaign encouraging library users to submit their votes online. For over a decade, the Library has partnered closely with the NYC Council on Participatory Budgeting by hosting information sessions and providing polling sites during voting week. In addition, local civic associations hold regular meetings and community activations at our libraries. In the past two years, these public meetings, combined with the Library's civic programming, have garnered attendance of more than 2,000. Our elected officials, including Speaker Adams and members of this Committee, regularly host mobile office hours and resource distribution events at our libraries, thereby promoting civil discourse and facilitating opportunities for direct constituent access to and engagement with their representatives.

At Queens Public Library, we believe it is one of our highest responsibilities to provide the 2.4 million residents of the borough free, trusted resources and spaces to discover and explore their interests and to better understand diverse ideas and viewpoints. We remain committed to collaborating with our government and community-based partners to help individuals be active, informed and engaged citizens.

Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to testify today.

**BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY TESTIMONY TO
COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES, AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS
OVERSIGHT HEARING: HOW LIBRARIES EMPOWER NEW YORKERS
TO BECOME INFORMED VOTERS AND ENGAGED CITIZENS
EDWIN MAXWELL, DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES
SEPTEMBER 25, 2024**

Good morning, Chair Rivera and members of the New York City Council. I am Edwin Maxwell and I oversee public service at 59 of Brooklyn Public Library's locations. On behalf of my 1,200+ colleagues and every Brooklynite: thank you for your unwavering support of libraries and your resolve in fighting against the library budget cuts this past Spring. It is with a joyous sigh of relief that we are back to the branch hours and services which our communities expect. I and all library workers look forward to the day we can go beyond restoring cuts and instead talk about increasing the hours we're available to our neighbors.

I started at Brooklyn Public Library 20 years ago, working with youth at Central Library. I've worked in many roles, in many branches, and I've seen firsthand the critical role public libraries play in strengthening the health of communities and democracy across our diverse neighborhoods. Much of what happens in a branch is centered around empowering our patrons to engage with the future – both their own and our society's. The sense of belonging which libraries instill among their patrons is a crucial first step toward the broader engagement and empowerment we're discussing today.

NON-PARTISAN VOTER REGISTRATION AND VOTER EDUCATION

Voter turnout in New York City is lower than ideal. We believe it is our responsibility as a City-funded organization to help with non-partisan voter education and engagement. BPL takes this duty seriously: every branch carries and promotes voter registration forms in the languages of that neighborhood; BPL uses our digital screens, web site and social media to promote upcoming elections and voter registration deadlines; and BPL branches host voter registration drives with organizations like the League of Women Voters, Brooklyn Voters Alliance and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority.

I am personally proud that 16 BPL branches serve as poll sites during general elections. This is no easy task: our staff arrive at 5:00am to open libraries and we are there until

11PM, far beyond our normal hours. Everyone, including our custodial team, public safety officers, branch staff and administrative staff, assists with this all-hands-on-deck effort to make sure voters have a nearby, safe space to vote.

With partners like the Campaign Finance Board, BPL branches host Ranked Choice Voting seminars, 'What's On the Ballot' sessions, and other programs that demystify voting by explaining what voters can expect at the polls. Staff-made book lists serve as guides for patrons interested in learning more about what is happening in the news – political and otherwise – around us.

BPL's five Adult Learning Centers help adults develop their reading and writing skills, finish their High School Equivalency Diploma, and learn English. These Centers have long integrated voter education and civic participation into their curriculum; this year we're offering voter and election themed swag to excite program participants about the election. BPL's Teen Tech Center staff and YA librarians encourage 16- and 17-year-olds in our teen programs to pre-register to vote while our Reentry Navigators help formerly incarcerated patrons to understand their rights and re-register to vote, if needed.

For the 2024 election season, we're offering special "Cast Your Vote" Story Times to encourage parents and caregivers to register to vote. In these story times, kids vote on the next books they'll read or which song they'll sing while all adults are shown how to check their voter registration status. We encourage program participants – and everyone here! -- to take your kids to vote with you and be a role model. Studies show that parents and caregivers who vote have children who vote. This program communicates that. We are very thankful to the City Council for generously funding this program through the City's First Readers Initiative.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMMING

What I've just described to you is a lot and takes a lot of effort to make it happen; but it is just the start of the civic engagement that happens in libraries. Library workers are dedicated to building community, fostering neighborhood connections, and increasing civic literacy. We intentionally cultivate a sense of belonging at our branches, from our programs to our emphasis on intellectual freedom, all with the larger goal of empowering our patrons.

BPL offers 20 volunteer-led conversation groups for English language learners each week and monthly community dinners for those reentering society after incarceration. Almost every week, a City Council Member, City Agency or City Commission utilizes a branch for

office hours or a program to invite neighbors to participate in our City's government. These programs deliberately center collaborative engagement to instill a sense of belonging and community.

As a society, we find it harder to talk about what's meaningful to us without relying on political cliches, especially online. BPL has launched a variety of programs to address this, including "Anthem to US," a recently concluded program with NYPL, QPL, and Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, which invited all voices to join in to create a contemporary national anthem echoing our collective hopes. 100 participants embarked on an immersive writing workshop series, three of these anthems were performed live at Lincoln Center on July 6, 2024.

In our 28th Amendment program, BPL invited Brooklynites to town hall meetings to debate ideas and suggest language that they would like to see in a new amendment to the Constitution, decades after the last amendment was issued in 1992. During the 2020 election cycle, we helped residents find their voice with "I Wish To Say," a program before the election which invited patrons to dictate messages which would be mailed in January to the next US President.

Working with the nonprofit news organization, *The City*, we have begun to establish neighborhood newsrooms at branches to facilitate information exchange. Residents develop newsletters which focus on what matters to them and their neighborhoods, assisted by librarians and journalists. By involving residents in every step of the process — from writing articles to newsletter distribution — we strengthen these residents' bonds to their neighborhood, their government, and to each other.

These projects are not just about delivering information or providing creative outlets — they also cultivate empowerment and a sense of belonging in one's community among our patrons.

CONCLUSION

As your previous hearings have highlighted, this work is under threat nationwide. This October, with the American Library Association and our fellow New York City libraries, BPL is spearheading a national day of action to rally for the freedom to read. On Saturday, October 19th, libraries across the country will gather their patrons and supporters to unite against book bans and demonstrate that the freedom to read is an enduring, non-partisan American value that must be protected. Libraries are facing a dire threat, and this day of



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Testimony of Dalvin Bartley
Mid-Atlantic Senior Program Manager, Generation Citizen
September 25, 2024
New York City Council

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of Generation Citizen (“GC”) at the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. I’m Dalvin Bartley, a Mid-Atlantic Senior Program Manager at Generation Citizen. Via our community-based civics curriculum, secondary school students apply social studies learning to the real world by studying and advocating on an issue of importance in their communities.

First and foremost, Generation Citizen is thankful for the Council’s \$500,000 investment this year in our programming and youth civics education through the *Civics Education in New York City Schools Initiative*. The City Council has generously funded this initiative for Generation Citizen since 2017, originally meant to support our programming in 125 classrooms. Since then, our footprint in New York City has more than doubled. Last school year (2023-24), we served approximately 250 New York City classrooms. To ensure that we can continue and maintain our growth, Generation Citizen seeks an increase of \$100,000 for a grant of \$600,000 in FY26 to support this significant and continued expansion of programming across the City.

Today, I am excited to testify about our voter education, engagement, and registration activities in New York City during this important election year to inform this hearing on how libraries empower New Yorkers to become informed voters and engaged citizens. Libraries play a crucial role in empowering New Yorkers to become informed voters and engaged citizens and GC partners with the NYPL to build relationships with our school partners and provide them with support with Participatory Action Research. Our programs and resources provide essential tools for understanding complex issues, evaluating candidates, and participating in the democratic process.

Through our RISE (Registering, Informing, Supporting and Empowering) Vote 2024 voter activation campaign, GC has created a toolkit and resources for teachers in 11th and 12th grade classrooms to inform, educate and register 17 and 18 year-old students who will be eligible to vote in November 2024. Building on our work this spring with high school classrooms, we are rolling

out a toolkit through our fall professional development programs as well as dedicated training. In particular, we are targeting 23 New York City public high schools, as well as engaging with 7 high schools in the Bronx (selected because [the Bronx has lowest voter registration rates](#) for 18-year olds, at 18.6%, relative to New York City's other four counties) with resources to run additional school-based voter education and registration events.

GC is a 14 year-old national, nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to demystifying democracy for youth by bringing civics education into the classroom through community-based civics. Community-based civics is a "student-centered, project-based approach to civics education that develops the individual skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary for 21st century democratic practice" ([National Action Civics Collaborative](#)). It differs from normative, knowledge-based civic education in the same way that taking any "hands-on," project-based, or experiential course differs from reading a textbook. Students learn about democratic structures and processes by directly engaging with them, as well as with each other, to address one or more issues they care about, which are impacting their community.

GC is incredibly thankful for the City Council's renewed funding despite myriad challenges and budgetary concerns in the last few years. GC hopes to continue partnering with the Council and the NY Public Library to continue bringing high quality civics education to our City schools.

Thank you for considering this testimony. I can be reached at dbartley@generationcitizen.org with any questions or comments.

September 27, 2024

Subject: Request for Investigation into the Kapparos Practice

Honorable Members of the City Council,

I am writing to urge you to regulate the kapparos practice and industry, which takes place annually in New York City. This year's events are scheduled to take place from October 6th to October 11th.

The kapparos practice involves the sale of live chickens for use in a religious ceremony, followed by their slaughter. In recent years, this practice has reached an industrial scale, with tens of thousands of chickens sold and slaughtered in public spaces across New York City, in the course of a week. Despite the scale of the operation, it is not regulated by any city agency. This lack of oversight results in numerous serious veterinary and public health code violations that compromise animal welfare and pose health risks to the community.

The animal welfare issues associated with this practice are particularly alarming: After being transported to the site of the kapparos, chickens are confined in cramped 2x2 foot transport cages, often holding up to 16 chickens per cage. They are held in these conditions for several days—sometimes extending to a week—without any access to food, water, or the ability to move. They are also left exposed to harsh weather conditions, including rain and heat.. Many chickens suffer and die due to thirst, starvation, hypothermia, and injuries sustained from the overcrowded environment. All of this occurs before any religious ceremony has taken place. The surviving chickens are sold for processing and use in the ceremony.

During the kapparos ceremony, untrained members of the public, often including children, handle the animals. This handling frequently results in significant injuries to the chickens, causing joint dislocations and trauma. Following the ceremony, the chickens are slaughtered. Although tradition dictates that the chickens should be consumed after slaughter, many of these animals are ultimately deemed unfit for consumption due to the poor conditions they endured in the preceding days. As a result, they are often discarded.

The entire kapparos process—including the storage, sale, and slaughter of the chickens—typically occurs in public spaces, often on busy streets or sidewalks around the city. The entire process occurs without veterinary license or permit and with no veterinary or public health official oversight. Despite lack of permit, these operations are frequently supported logistically by the NYPD, which raises questions about the city's commitment to enforcing animal welfare and public health laws.

Many in our community are deeply uncomfortable with the manner in which this practice is carried out, and the lack of city oversight. Despite years of protests, the city has not taken meaningful action to regulate this practice, even as numerous veterinary codes are violated within city limits. I believe the suffering of the animals and public health risks can be mitigated with proper city oversight, ensuring processing and handling of live poultry in accordance with existing veterinary and public health codes.

I respectfully request the council to initiate an investigation into the kapparos practice and industry, to determine how the city can ensure that the practice is carried out in compliance with veterinary and public health laws, prioritizing both animal welfare and the health of our community.

Thank you for your attention to this matter

Joshua Tyberg

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dr. Grandy McNeil

Address: _____

I represent: The NY Public Library

Address: 445 Fifth Ave.

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 9-25-24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Thomas Sobel

Address: _____ Bklyn 11215

I represent: Myself + Move the Money NYC

Address: as above

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms