



**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
FISCAL YEAR 2024 EXECUTIVE BUDGET OVERSIGHT HEARING**

**THE
CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES & INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS
COMMITTEE JOINTLY WITH THE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
May 18, 2023**

Good morning, my name is Tony Marx and I am the president of the New York Public Library (NYPL). I want to thank City Council Speaker Adams, Chairs Ossé and Brannan, and the members of the committees for the opportunity to testify this morning on the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) Executive Budget.

We are grateful to have been spared from the most recent round of funding cuts announced in April. At the same time, Libraries still face one of the most significant proposed cuts in recent history in the form of \$20.5M from the Mayor and \$15.7M in non-baselined city council funds for a total of \$36.2M. At NYPL, these cuts will have an adverse impact on the New Yorkers that currently rely on us more than ever, which is why I am here today to advocate for the full restoration of library expense funding. At less than half of one percent of the entire city budget, libraries bring an unparalleled return on investment through their presence across New York's communities. We provide free after school and teen services in underserved communities, career services for job seekers, and reliable partnership to the City in times of crisis as we did during the pandemic and now through the support of asylum seekers. But these cuts significantly hamstring our ability to continue serving New Yorkers and the City impactfully. It is especially disappointing that they are coming at this time, just as the Library is starting to regain its momentum, with patrons engaging with in-person services at their highest levels since the pandemic.

If the City moves forward with these cuts, roughly 100 Full Time Equivalentents will be removed, which could be absorbed and/or operationalized in different ways. About half of our locations will need to cut back to five day service. As you are aware, it wasn't that long ago that the Library received City support to expand to universal six day service, a change that was hailed by New Yorkers and elected officials alike. It would be a shame to renege on this.

In previous testimonies, you heard a lot about our new Teens 360 initiative. Teens 360 provides young adults with the places to socialize, supportive adults, and exposure to new experiences they need to find their own voice. We know the pandemic was particularly hard on our young people, and we know that right now, they need help. Our flagship Teen Center at SNFL is thriving. Teens from all over the city can be found there on any given day using its state of the art recording studio, forming new friendships, and getting help with their school work and college aspirations. This fiscal year, we are in the process of opening 19 additional teen centers, including Van Cortlandt, Parkchester, and Soundview in the Bronx, Harlem in Manhattan, and St. George Library Center on Staten Island. Losing funding will have an impact on these teen centers, which, when operating on a reduced schedule, will host fewer programs and visits; the savings hardly seem worth the loss of this service for our most at-risk population - teens.

Providing access to reading materials and knowledge is the foundation of what we do as a public library. We know that books are not available evenly across this city and that children in lower income neighborhoods are less likely to read at grade level. We have invested in initiatives to ensure equity and access in collections located in low income neighborhoods where patrons rely on them more. NYPL's new Center for Educators and Schools draws upon our collections and their accessibility to eliminate the barriers our city's teachers face when seeking resources for curricula, lesson plans, and other activities. But a reduction in staff and library materials stemming from this loss in funding will hinder our ability to maintain and move

forward with our collections agenda. Research services are another direct byproduct of our mission to provide equitable access to information to all New Yorkers. Funding supports the acquisition of materials along with initiatives like digitization, collection enhancement, and the introduction of new offerings such as “Scan and Deliver,” which provides for remote access to our resources. It will not be possible to continue doing this at the same level with a \$36.2M cut, which means delays and reductions in our research services, making them less accessible.

NYPL’s decentralized structure gives it a ubiquitous presence across all the communities it serves. This is why the City comes to us in times of crisis, asking us to step up as a key partner. The pandemic was perhaps the best example of our libraries being the “swiss army knives” of New York City, which is a term Mayor Adams so aptly coined for us. During the period when branches were physically closed, four of our locations were repurposed as Learning Labs to complement the partial school reopening for the 2020-2021 school year. Closed and open locations also served as Covid testing and vaccination sites. All of New York’s public libraries currently provide free at-home Covid test-kits to anyone who walks through our doors. These ad-hoc partnerships sprang from the effectiveness of other long-established ones, with libraries serving as IDNYC centers, polling sites, and cooling centers.

Now, as the city seeks to manage its current asylum seeker crisis, the Library’s efforts have again proven indispensable. Our Bronx Library Center branch quickly became a hub for hundreds of asylees arriving in New York City. Our branch staff have worked diligently in partnership with IDNYC and the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) team to expand our capacity to meet this spike in demand for both IDNYC and library services. NYPL recently created 5,000 “Welcome Kits” in both English and Spanish that include information about library services, city resources, and backpacks, folders, pencils, notebooks, crayons and coloring sheets for kids. These kits have been distributed at our branches and across the city at

community events in partnership with organizations such as the New York Immigration Coalition. We are currently preparing to distribute more this summer. We have worked with NYC Health and Hospitals to bring in-person library card enrollment services to three Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Centers (HERRCs), located in Manhattan. The reduction in staff that this cut necessitates will make it harder to continue supporting the City in this crisis. Staff have been critical to managing the crowds lining up at Bronx Library Center every day, distributing welcome kits, and participating in outreach events.

An essential piece to effectively providing our services is the spaces that have the resources, capacities, and functionalities to host them. In addition to the full restoration of our expense funds, we are asking for \$80 million in new capital funding for each system to contribute to our ongoing needs. Our new capital needs total \$536M with projects such as major renovations of the Tompkins Square, Seward Park, Francis Martin, Spuyten Duyvil, and Hudson Park branches, among others. Projects currently in-process include complete renovations of five, 100-plus year-old Carnegie branches in high-needs areas: Melrose and Hunts Point in the Bronx, Fort Washington and 125th Street in Manhattan, and Port Richmond in Staten Island. These locations have been in dire need of capital upgrades for decades; their top-to-bottom renovation—made possible with funding previously committed by the City under the 10-year capital plan—allows us to meet community needs such as ADA accessibility, dedicated spaces for teens and children, and facade restoration. Renovations at six locations: Port Richmond, Melrose, 125th Street, Hunts Point, Inwood, and Muhlenberg, are slated to be completed in FY24, but this reduction will cause three of these reopenings to be delayed. These delayed branches are also slated to be part of the planned expansion of additional teen centers. New capital needs continue to significantly outpace the capital funding we receive each year. Your support of our FY24 capital request is critical to the continued progress in renovating and maintaining library locations throughout the Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island.

For less than half of one percent of the total budget, the Library has proved itself unmatched in its ability to reach our communities with free offerings in education, outreach, collections, and city partnership. Today I explained how this cut stands to materially impact this ability. When considering this impact in the context of the challenges our city faces, it is clear that a cut to the New York Public Library, is a cut to all New Yorkers.

Thank you for your time, I am happy to take any questions.