



Statement by Nick Buron, Chief Librarian & SVP, Queens Public Library

**New York City Council's Committee on Finance jointly with the Committee on
Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations
Fiscal Year 2023 Executive Budget Hearing**

May 13, 2022

Good morning. I am Nick Buron, Chief Librarian and Senior Vice President at Queens Public Library (QPL, Library). Thank you, Chairs Brannan and Ossé, Speaker Adams, and the members of these esteemed committees for the opportunity to speak with you today about our budget priorities for Fiscal Year 2023. On behalf of the Library and our President & CEO Dennis Walcott, it is a pleasure to be here.

I would like to thank Mayor Adams and his administration for their thoughtful consideration of libraries in the Fiscal Year 2023 Executive Budget. QPL received \$26.5 million in earmarked capital funding for three branches in need of renovations. This investment represents the Administration's understanding that safe and modern spaces are vital to the people and communities that these libraries serve.

When I testified before the Libraries Committee in March, I stated that QPL had a need of \$270 million over the next 10 years to bring all of the libraries in our system into a state of good repair, as well as the need for reliable and consistent capital funding. As important as Mayoral funding is, the capital funding that the Speaker and City Council provide to libraries at budget adoption is just as important.

The Mayor's and City Council's capital investments in libraries over the last several years have had a significant and positive impact on the state of our facilities. Your continued support is crucial. Therefore, we look forward to continuing to work with the administration and the City Council to address the additional capital needs we still have. **We are extremely grateful for the Council's consideration of QPL's \$10 million unrestricted capital funding request.**

QPL did not receive any new operating funds in the Fiscal Year 2023 Executive Budget. **We have shared with the administration the significance of Queens', New York's and Brooklyn's (Tri-Li) collective operating ask of \$15.7 million in new funding (\$4 million for QPL).** As New Yorkers continue to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, the libraries are committed to being here for them. We must be able to meet the growing demand for digital content and address critical infrastructure issues in a timely fashion. Having the funding to resolve issues before they became major capital problems means our doors stay open to the public and more resources are available to provide robust core services to the many people who rely on libraries to find success in their lives.

During the Preliminary Budget hearing, **I also discussed how important it is for the City Council to act to reauthorize, at minimum, its \$14 million Library Initiative (of which QPL would receive \$3.9 million).** This funding is essential, especially given the current economic situation of high inflation and serious supply chain delays plaguing many industries. It allows us to address non-capitally eligible and critical maintenance projects across the system and at locations such as Corona, Flushing, Woodside and Rosedale. This initiative has also supported staffing levels, allowed us to hire security guards, funded afterschool programming, and allowed us to purchase new materials, including learning software for our HSE and ESOL students.

Every day, we transform lives by cultivating intellectual and personal growth. A recent student of ours, Amairani Grajales, shared her Citizenship class experience with us. She was extremely thankful to have been able to enroll in free courses and receive assistance from a trusted institution. She complimented her instructor, Mr. Julian, on his professionalism and enjoyed the online interaction with her peers. With their support and after diligent preparation, she took and passed the citizenship exam. She described the great pride she experienced as a result, and I am proud to announce that Ms. Grajales' Oath Ceremony took place on February 5, 2022.

Rakibuddin Khan and her daughter Sabahat were struggling when they first arrived in Queens from Bangladesh in 2015. When they discovered Queens Public Library, they found caring staff to help. Sabahat attended our free Kick-off to Kindergarten (K2K) program, where she built relationships with her teachers and peers and prepared for school in a new country. Ms. Khan credits the library with helping her learn how to better manage her finances. As she put it, "I learned a lot of things about how life can be changed. Even if you want very little, you have to know how to secure your future. That is what I learned from the library." Now, Ms. Khan continues visiting the library to borrow reading materials in her native language, as well as books on financial management and world economies. Sabahat visits to learn more about her Bangla culture through bilingual story times and participate in STEM activities. They credit the great staff, Ms. Bri and Ms. Salma Islam, for guiding and helping them whenever they are in need.

Daymien, a student at Martin Van Buren High School, has been attending the Cambria Heights Library since he was in the eighth grade. Over the years, he has come to view the library as his own space where he can learn new things and concentrate on subjects that interest him, such as video games and graphic design. As he considers the next phase of his educational journey, Daymien credits the teen center staff, Ms. Amanda, Ms. Chantel and Ms. Sherry, for helping him think about college and realize his interest in graphic design. He describes them as family, calling them his "Power Ranger" team as they each have their unique way of helping him with things such as understanding the college process, learning technology or participating in new programming. According to Daymien, the Cambria Heights Library has made him "more outgoing and more comfortable" with who he is as an individual and, because of that, he will never forget the staff at the library.

These individuals give voice to the millions of people who rely on their local public libraries for free, trustworthy and vital resources, programs, and information. We are the center of our communities. Strong libraries build strong communities, and an investment in New York's public libraries is an investment in all New Yorkers. For the Library to meet the needs of our patrons, especially those who are most vulnerable, we respectfully ask for your

continued financial support and ask that you prioritize QPL and New York City's libraries in the Adopted Fiscal Year 2023 Budget.

Chairs Brannan and Ossé, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.