



**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
FISCAL YEAR 2023 EXECUTIVE BUDGET OVERSIGHT HEARING**

**THE FINANCE COMMITTEE JOINTLY WITH
CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES & INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS
May 13, 2022**

Good morning, my name is Tony Marx and I am the president of The New York Public Library (NYPL). I would like to thank City Council Speaker Adams, Chairs Brannan and Ossé and the members of the committees for the opportunity to testify this morning on the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) Executive Budget.

Although the health and safety threats of the pandemic continue to diminish, its economic and social impact remains an acute challenge for our city. As we continue our progress along the road of recovery and renewal, public libraries are uniquely positioned to address this challenge with our ubiquitous presence across communities throughout the City, offering a range of free programs, services, materials, and more. In addition to the full restoration of our service to pre-pandemic levels, NYPL is maintaining initiatives like outdoor programming, preserving aspects of our digital and remote services, enhancing our collections and implementing our youth and education agenda with teen programming as its centerpiece. We are pleased to see that the Mayor's FY23 Executive Budget does not include a cut to libraries, as this allows us to maintain our basic programs and services. But to meet the needs of the moment, the Library must do more than it ever has before in an environment of strained resources. Our ability to rise

to this occasion hinges on sufficient support to a staff that fulfills competing roles on a daily basis. Since the crisis began, our branch staff have stepped up to serve not only as librarians, but as career counselors, tutors, book club moderators, teen program administrators, early literacy specialists, and civic engagement coordinators. Our current priorities and associated staff needs have informed our FY23 expense budget request that the council's non-baselined \$14M allocation for libraries in FY22 be fully restored and that an additional \$15.7M in new priority library needs are funded.

As noted, the Library's primary interests right now are in youth and education initiatives. We know that children and teens have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, which widened learning gaps that already existed between high and low needs communities. Our youth initiatives seek to address these gaps through equity and access to learning and development opportunities and resources from the time a child is born to their graduation from high school. We continue to discuss opportunities to enhance our programming for youth and teens with the Mayor and his staff.

Infancy and Childhood

Early Literacy

Our youth and education programs and services begin at birth and have been designed with the aim of preparing our youngest patrons for enrollment in primary schools. Through programs like storytime, family literacy workshops, and Pre-K for all partnerships, NYPL has established itself as the leading provider of early literacy programs and services in the city. In 2019, these programs reached over 722,000 attendees. We look forward to exceeding this number as we continue the full restoration of in-person programs and maintain digital offerings. Activities like our "Little Movers" and family storytimes are tailored to infants, toddlers, children, and caregivers, and they provide opportunities for participants to listen to stories and sing songs as

they build their early literacy skills. “Open Play” targets toddlers and children, and invites families to a space where kids can play and caregivers can form community bonds. Our summer learning book kit giveaway program also includes reading materials curated for the “birth to three” age group. As our kids grow older, they become eligible to participate in valuable K through 12 programs such as NYPL After School, continued engagement with Summer Learning materials, the Center for Educators, and our Teens 360 initiative.

After School

In the fall of 2021, we launched our new drop-in after school program, with free homework help, tutoring, and career exploration services. NYPL After School is currently in 20 of our branches, and aims to help students in historically marginalized communities keep pace with their more affluent peers; a dire need after losing a year of in-person learning. The Library has recruited a diverse group of tutors to its after school program that includes both mission-driven education students as well as retirees with extensive experience. Lead Tutors reflect multiple dimensions of diversity within age, race, disability status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and nationality, with 17 languages represented. The tutors and children’s librarians also create and execute Science Technology Engineering Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) and literacy-based activities to inspire a love of reading and learning. Healthy snacks are provided to each participant to ensure that hunger does not prevent them from completing their homework. At each site, additional tutoring support for younger students comes from Teen Reading Ambassadors—paid high school interns trained in literacy fundamentals and educational best practices as part of a workforce readiness effort.

This new approach to after school programming has already proven impactful. In its first six months, NYPL After School offered over 1,200 programs to a total of nearly 8,700 attendees. Over 86% of our daily attendees to date have come from New York City public, public charter,

and community schools. The remaining 14% come from homeschooling environments or local independent and parochial schools. Nearly all of the independent and parochial schools whose students this program reaches enroll high numbers of students with vouchers and/or provide financial aid to students of low socioeconomic status. We look forward to expanding the program in the coming months, with at least ten additional branches in the Bronx slated to become after school locations in Fiscal Year 22.

Teens 360

Our focus on responding to youth and education disparities in our city ultimately hinges upon the programming we offer to teens and young adults. After a lifetime of participation in developmental programs that aim to provide our children with the tools they need to reach their full potential, teenagers and young adults stay at the Library to make critical decisions about their post secondary-education futures. This is why we launched Teens 360, a new initiative that delivers holistic services for teens, meeting their needs here and now while equipping them with the tools to succeed in the future.

Perhaps the most integral pieces to Teens 360 are our new teen centers, which serve as hubs for many of our expanded young adult services. Teen centers provide access to free, up-to-date technologies, spaces to gather and socialize, as well as both academic and socio-emotional support. Young adults can gather at teen centers to build digital literacy through the use of new technology and tools and by collaborating on projects that help them develop the technological and media fluency they need for post-secondary success. Our flagship teen center is at our newly-renovated central circulating library, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library (SNFL). On any given weekday you can easily find teens from across the city there utilizing books, computers, programs, staff expertise, or a state-of-the-art recording studio. In FY22 thus far (through mid-April), the SNFL Teen Center has hosted 93 program sessions with 425 attendees. This year, the Library will open seven additional teen centers in underserved neighborhoods at

Wakefield, Woodstock, Van Cortlandt, and Grand Concourse in the Bronx; Countee Cullen and Bloomingdale in Manhattan; and West New Brighton in Staten Island.

Teens are also the primary target audience of our College and Career Pathways initiative, which coordinates more than a dozen virtual programs offered every month that are designed to support students navigating the postsecondary education and planning process and address college application protocols altered by Covid-19. Specific offerings include one-on-one counseling, information sessions on updates to the application and enrollment process, and panel presentations by current university students on “College Life during Covid.” We also assist teens with resumes and cover letters and hold info sessions on Covid-related changes to standardized testing and financial aid. We have coordinated these activities with the help of external partners such as the Princeton Review, Collegewise, and City agencies like DOE, and DYCD. Perhaps our most noteworthy offering is our annual, enrollment-based Intensive College and Career Access Network – or ICCAN – program. This initiative helps teens navigate their postsecondary options and prepare for their lives after high school with monthly workshops on ACT and SAT test prep, financial aid and scholarships, college and career fairs, and essay-writing skills, among others. ICCAN also provides one-on-one guidance to students on how to craft a strong college application, fill out financial aid/FAFSA forms, and apply for scholarship and internship opportunities. This program has been designed with equity and access in mind, with hub branches in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island targeting underserved communities. A total of 600 College and Career Pathways programs have been offered thus far in FY 22 (through March) with two-thirds of them being one-on-one career counseling sessions.

Youth of all Ages

Coexisting alongside these specific services are initiatives that are geared toward all ages, which youth may find themselves engaging with year after year throughout their primary and

secondary education. The Center for Educators (CES), which makes library materials and services accessible to educators (curricula using primary sources, educational projects tied to our Polonsky Exhibition of The New York Public Library's Treasures, etc), has already proven to be a powerful tool in breaking down learning and development barriers for youth in underserved communities. Currently the CES is supporting the completion of the long-awaited Schomburg Curriculum Project, which includes lesson plans that help middle-and high-school students use unique primary sources to deepen their understanding of Black history.

We continue to make adjustments to our Summer Learning program in the interest of reaching those students who need it most. NYPL's Summer Learning program is comprised of a series of free events, take-home activities, and resources that aim to encourage young New Yorkers to invest in their intellectual development and creative exploration, and become confident and curious self-directed learners. An expansion of the Library's long-standing Summer Reading program, the Summer Learning program unites traditional summer reading elements with new educational initiatives and materials to frame reading and learning as active and enjoyable activities for children grades Kindergarten through six. Activities include a six week STEAM 'Summer Cruise' in participating branches and special events featuring authors and illustrators that represent our kids and show them a future of possibilities through reading. Summer Learning traditionally includes book and literacy kit giveaways targeting high needs communities (nearly 70% of kits distributed in 2021 were in areas considered high needs). In addition to these efforts, in 2022 the Library is giving away 500,000 books for kids and teens to keep, immersing them in reading at home and creating a connection to the Library and to reading.

Teens make up an indispensable piece of our summer programming. In keeping with this year's theme of "Oceans of Possibilities," the Library invites teens to "Make Waves" through community engagement and activism. At all of our neighborhood branches, as well as through

social media, teens across NYC can engage in fun weekly, creative challenges and have the opportunity for their work to be published in a system-wide NYPL Teen Magazine. The magazine will feature creative work (i.e. narrative essays, photography, poetry, etc.) that reflects the theme of civic activism and how teens can “Make Waves” in their communities. Additionally, teens can participate in social media calls to action, volunteer for and attend special events and author programs, and explore library resources.

Lastly, our elimination of late fines on books and other circulating materials in the fall of 2021 has removed a significant barrier to access for youth of all ages. In October 2021, almost 113,000 library cards belonging to kids and teens would have been blocked because of fine accruals.

In addition to our current focus on youth and education, NYPL continues to offer a wide range of programs and services to our adult patrons. Our ESOL classes help immigrants improve their language skills, to advance their careers, to connect with their communities and to support the next generation’s success. For job-seekers and those facing financial challenges, we provide job training courses, one-on-one career and financial counseling, coaching for interviews, and templates for resumes, cover letters, and emails. NYPL offers a robust TechConnect program, which administers courses specifically geared toward the development of professional skill-sets such as advanced proficiency within the Microsoft Office suite, coding, and website development. Since the pandemic, we have ensured the availability of these services digitally, and plan to maintain aspects of this virtual presence as we restore our in-person offerings.

Capital

Key to providing these programs and services though, are spaces with the sufficient resources, capacities, and modernized functionalities to host and coordinate them. We know that when we

renovate our spaces or build new ones to better accommodate the needs of New Yorkers, they are used more. Woodstock Library in the Bronx completed a major renovation in 2018. In its first full year post-renovation versus its last full year pre-renovation, the branch saw an 8% increase in visits and a 20% increase in circulation. Washington Heights Library in Manhattan similarly saw a 47% increase in visits, a 45% increase in circulation, and a 105% increase in program attendance in its first year post renovation in 2014. The value of our infrastructure to our programs and services is why we advocated to safely continue ongoing capital projects immediately after physical closure in March 2020. These projects included the construction of the new Charleston branch on Staten Island, a new Roosevelt Island Library, a renovated New Amsterdam Library and Bloomingdale Library, and 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 committed by the City under the 10-year capital plan—allows us to meet community needs for improvements such as ADA accessibility, dedicated spaces for teens and children, and facade restoration. In March, we cut the ribbon on our Charleston Library. The brand new branch has already served 1,600 children through youth programming and signed up nearly 2,000 patrons of all ages for new library cards.

These capital improvements were largely made possible through the support of the City -- Mayor, Speaker, City Council and Borough Presidents -- but there is so much more we need to do. We are grateful to the Mayor for his commitment in the FY23 Executive Budget Plan to provide \$40M to the NYPL to continue this work. At the same time, more funding is needed for our buildings to become trusted spaces for the coordination of our programs and services. NYPL has \$296M in systemwide capital needs. Priorities identified include: complete renovations of the Edenwald, West New Brighton, Francis Martin, Spuyten Duyvil, and Countee

Cullen branches and state of good repair projects such as HVAC, Boilers and ADA accessibility; technology upgrades; and funding of project shortfalls. New needs currently outpace the amount of capital the city has committed to libraries. This is why we are again asking that the Speaker and the City Council support the three library system's FY23 budget request for an additional \$35M in capital funding (\$15M for NYPL's three boroughs - the Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island). This funding will allow us to address priority capital needs and continue the great progress we have made together. Additionally, we cannot overstate the importance of including libraries in the City's 10-year capital plan, which only happened once, in 2015 (FY16 Executive Plan). The only way to appropriately plan for and address the systemwide capital needs of the city's 217 public library buildings is through consistent, long-term capital funding and planning within the 10-year capital plan, as is customary for other city infrastructure and agencies.

Since its inception and throughout the various crises that have challenged our city, the Library has never wavered in its commitment to equal access to books, knowledge, and education for all. This is why we are so attuned to the pandemic's disproportionate impact on our youth and are uniquely positioned to address it. Whether in one of our branches as a toddler listening to story time, in an elementary school classroom taking advantage of our Center for Educators, back at the branch as a preteen getting tutored after school, or as a high school teenager putting it all together in one of our teen centers, our city's children and teens can count on us for access to the tools, resources, and development opportunities they need to reach their full potential. We hope we can count on your partnership and support to meet this critical moment for our city's youth.

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