

1 COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND  
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS JOINTLY WITH THE  
COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION 1

2 CITY COUNCIL  
3 CITY OF NEW YORK

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5 TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

6 Of the

7 COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,  
LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL  
8 INTERGROUP RELATIONS JOINTLY WITH  
THE COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

9 ----- X

10 November 19, 2019  
11 Start: 10:13 a.m.  
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12 HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

13 B E F O R E: James G. Van Bramer,  
14 Chairperson

15 Carlos Menchaca,  
16 Chairperson on the Committee on  
Immigration

17  
18 COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
19 Joseph C. Borelli  
Laurie A. Cumbo  
20 Mark Gjonaj  
Francisco P. Moya

21  
22  
23  
24  
25

A P P E A R A N C E S

Tony Marx  
President and CEO of the New York Public Library

Linda Johnson  
President and CEO of the Brooklyn Public Library

Dennis Walcott President and CEO of the Queens  
Public Library

Colette Samman  
Executive Director of IDNYC

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CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: [GAVEL] Good morning to  
our three Presidents and CEO's of our public library  
systems and also, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant  
Affairs.

Is Colette with us? Do you want to join the  
panel. Okay, so when they finish testifying you will  
go up on the panel, okay? Okay, and then you will be  
sworn in.

So, I want to welcome everyone today to our joint  
oversight hearing with the Committee on Immigration  
regarding the role of Public Libraries in support of  
immigrant New Yorkers.

My name is Jimmy Van Bramer and I am Chair of the  
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and  
International Intergroup Relations and I want to  
thank my colleague Council Member Carlos Menchaca,  
Chair of the Committee on Immigration who is such an  
amazing leader and champion on these issues for being  
a part of this important hearing today. And I think  
we all know and appreciate the role that public  
libraries play in serving and empowering immigrant  
communities in all five boroughs. And I am always  
proud of the work that the Brooklyn Public Library,

1 the New York Public Library and the Queens Public  
2 Library do and have been doing really for decades.

3  
4 But in these paralysis times where so many are  
5 being vilified and attacked, it is even more  
6 important than ever that we go further in libraries,  
7 dig deeper and think further about how much more we  
8 can do to serve immigrant communities. Because I  
9 have always believed that if we are proud to call  
10 ourselves a sanctuary city, which we are, our public  
11 libraries were the original sanctuary in this city  
12 long before we even adopted that moniker. Our public  
13 libraries were doing that work and probably serving  
14 in that capacity before anyone even realized it or  
15 gave libraries credit for that.

16 So, the services are many and we'll hear from the  
17 Presidents and CEO's, but just sum include the  
18 Immigrant Justice Corp, we're under the supervision  
19 of experienced immigration attorneys. Individuals  
20 can seek information and referrals to trusted  
21 immigration specialists for helping filing  
22 applications for temporary protected status, TPA,  
23 naturalization, Deferred Action for Childhood  
24 Arrivals DACA, work permits, visas, and Violence  
25 Against Women VAWA petitions. Libraries also offer

1  
2 special programming such as the New Americans Corners  
3 program, that are located in every branch and of  
4 course the Queens Public Libraries New Americans  
5 Program was born over 40 years ago and something that  
6 we should all be very proud of.

7 Obviously, there is assistance with the United  
8 States Citizenship and Immigration services and the  
9 Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and there is so  
10 much more that we can do.

11 Additionally, of course, free library workshops  
12 provide information with the rights of immigrant New  
13 Yorkers and an overview of services such as IDNYC,  
14 New York City's Municipal ID Card and we can't talk  
15 about IDNYC without talking about the role that our  
16 public libraries played in making it as successful as  
17 it is. We could not have done it without the  
18 cooperation of libraries and I want to salute my  
19 colleague Chair Menchaca of course whose work on that  
20 made history in the city of New York.

21 ActionNYC, an immigration legal screening service  
22 and NYCitizenship, We Speak NYC which I'm interested  
23 to learn more about and NYC Care, a health care  
24 access program that guarantees low-cost and no-cost  
25

1 services to New Yorkers who do not qualify for or  
2 cannot afford health insurance.

3  
4 Finally, as I know well, and I think all of us  
5 appreciate, the library service is a cultural center  
6 providing forms for music, drama, dance, poetry,  
7 storytelling, arts and crafts, for new immigrants who  
8 have come to the United States. While maintaining and  
9 celebrating the rich ethnic history that contributes  
10 to the wonderful cultural diversity that is New York  
11 City.

12 Today, we are here to learn about the services  
13 and programs for immigrant in Brooklyn Queens and the  
14 New York Public Library system. But we also want to  
15 talk about how libraries are the trusted space and  
16 how we can better serve immigrant communities,  
17 enhance partnerships with community based  
18 organizations. And how the city can support these  
19 efforts in a time that is dire for many immigrant  
20 communities and families.

21 Finally, I want to thank my Legislative Director  
22 Jack Bernatovicz, my Chief of Staff Matt Wallace, the  
23 Committee's Finance Analyst Aliya Ali, our  
24 Legislative Policy Analyst Cristy Dwyer and our  
25 Committee Counsel Nell Beekman and I would like now

1  
2 turn it over to my Co-Chair and friend, Council  
3 Member Carlos Menchaca.

4 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: Buenos Diaz to everyone and  
5 thank you to my amigo and admono Chair Van Bramer.  
6 The work that we do and we've done before, this is  
7 not the first time that we've had a joint hearing.

8 When we can bring the conversation around  
9 immigrants and the kind of cultural energy of the  
10 city together, some beautiful things happen and IDNYC  
11 as a program and the incredible execution that the  
12 Administration has done really with the support of  
13 your vision that cultivated so much connection to the  
14 cultural institutions and the libraries. I think  
15 that's one of the magical things about this card and  
16 I know you helped so much to ensure that everybody  
17 was at the table. So, thank you for that.

18 And so, what I want to do is really kind of bring  
19 us and connect us to the work that the Immigration  
20 Committee has been doing for awhile now as we talk  
21 about the libraries.

22 The Committee continues to explore many  
23 dimensions of the everyday lives of immigrant New  
24 Yorkers. We've held hearing on language access in  
25 city agencies and accessing legal services, existing

1  
2 mental health support and our municipal ID card, the  
3 IDNYC. A card intended to simplify the very act of  
4 entering government buildings among other things.

5 At a time when our communities are under attack  
6 by a vicious and overly White supremacy, federal  
7 administration, we need trusted and safe public  
8 spaces more than ever. To convene, to share  
9 information and to provide resources. With over 200  
10 branches citywide, our libraries quietly serve this  
11 powerful role within our neighborhoods.

12 It is in fact the libraries who are the critical  
13 component of civic life. They provide democratic  
14 platforms to share knowledge in more than just  
15 written form. For example, many of the city's  
16 libraries host citizen classes, English conversation  
17 classes, family cultural events, adult literacy  
18 courses for adults. And as we prepare for the 2020  
19 Census, the city has invested \$1.4 million in the  
20 three library systems for a coordinated census  
21 effort.

22 This will allow New Yorkers to complete their  
23 census online at their local library branch. The  
24 three library systems also offer the New American  
25 Corners the Chair mentioned NAC, which is a dedicated

1  
2 program serving immigrants by creating a space to  
3 provide materials and informational resources on the  
4 citizenship and other immigration related topics of  
5 interest, partnering with the USCIS and MOIA.

6 This program offers studied materials and online  
7 resources to help individuals prepare for the US  
8 history and civics questions and the citizenship  
9 exam.

10 NAC also offers workshops of New York City  
11 services such as IDNYC, ActionNYC, NYCitizenship, NYC  
12 Care and We Speak NYC as well as information about  
13 public charge and ICE.

14 And importantly in this time of increased  
15 immigration enforcement and fear among immigrant  
16 communities, the Immigrant Justice Corp provides  
17 immigration screening services and referrals to  
18 immigration specialists through city libraries.

19 Libraries hold a special place in my heart. As a  
20 child, and I'm just actually, before I tell my story.  
21 I love hearing Chair Van Bramer's stories about him  
22 working the libraries. I want to see pictures if  
23 there is pictures, it would be kind of cool to kind  
24 of see.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: There is lots of  
3 picture.

4 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: There's a lot of pictures,  
5 okay, I want to see some of them. I can't give you  
6 this picture but I will describe it to you.

7 So, as a child, I remember my brother dropping me  
8 off at our library in El Paso Texas and I remember  
9 going together with my mom and this was a Head Start  
10 Program that she was dropping me off and she said,  
11 you know, hijo, you have to learn English and that  
12 was like her only send off. She was like, this is  
13 why you are going to go to this place, to this  
14 library, you are going to learn English and I had not  
15 spoken English. Spanish is my first language and  
16 there I go with a superman tin lunchbox and a burrito  
17 that she made.

18 Later, I found about Doritos and ham sandwiches  
19 but here I am with my burrito and it was at this Head  
20 Start program that I got to learn and really through  
21 the privilege of education learn English. And for  
22 that, I will always be supportive of libraries and  
23 the power that they have in our communities,  
24 especially our immigrant communities as a space  
25 that's not just safe but can really open up the world

1 for you. Now, I'm here in New York doing this good  
2 work with all of you.  
3

4 The New York Public Library reports that it has  
5 increased outreach to recent immigrants and further  
6 expanded its robust language and citizenship  
7 offerings, to ensure immigrants can access the free  
8 legal services they need.

9 Today, I hope to hear about how the  
10 Administration and all three libraries together are  
11 making language access a cornerstone for their  
12 service delivery model for immigrant New Yorkers.  
13 Increasing literacy across the city is a noble goal.  
14 In our city, 50 percent of immigrant New Yorkers are  
15 considered to have limited English proficiency.  
16 Without full language access, there remains a gap in  
17 English language, let alone literacy. And I believe  
18 that libraries are uniquely positioned to respond to  
19 this.

20 So, I look forward to this conversation. I want  
21 to thank staff who helped work on this hearing. The  
22 Committee Counsel Harbani Ahuja, Committee Policy  
23 Analyst Elizabeth Kronk, my Chief of Staff Lorena  
24 Lucero, Legislative Director Cesar Vargas and  
25 Communications Director Tony Chiarito, as well as the

staff of the Cultural Affairs, Libraries and  
International Intergroup Relations.

Thank you so much, I'm looking forward to this.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much  
Chair Menchaca and that story of you and your  
lunchbox is impossibly adorable and you never get  
tired of hearing stories of people and their love  
affair with their libraries and their first  
experiences with their libraries and how they came to  
get their libraries.

And I'll just share, you know I grew up in  
Astoria, Queens and our library was the Broadway  
branch and it was there that I got my first library  
card and I remember my mother taking me at the very  
spot in that library where I got the card and when I  
got the card, I felt for the first time in my life  
that I was like a person. You know, because I could  
see that I had this ticket to all of this information  
and then learned how to read and really appreciate  
books up in the childrens room on the second floor at  
the Broadway branch in Astoria. Only to then go to  
work for the Queens Public Library system for eleven  
years and help that library and now, I represent that  
branch in my district and we have renovated virtually

1 the entire library. But most importantly, my mother  
2 was there with me when we cut the ribbon on the  
3 reopening of the newly renovated children's room at  
4 the Broadway Library, the very same room I learned  
5 how to read. So, it's an incredible story. All of  
6 ours and our love affairs with our public libraries  
7 and everything that you all do.

9 So, I want to welcome a member of the Cultural  
10 Affairs and Libraries Committee, Council Member  
11 Francisco Moya, also of Queens and I think we're  
12 going to hear now from our three Presidents and CEO's  
13 in the order that they choose but I will recognize  
14 them. Tony Marx, President and CEO of the New York  
15 Public Library; Linda Johnson President and CEO of  
16 the Brooklyn Public Library and Dennis Walcott  
17 President and CEO of the Queens Public Library. You  
18 may begin.

19 TONY MARX: Good morning, I'm Tony Marx and I  
20 want to start by of course thanking Speaker Corey  
21 Johnson, Chairs Jimmy Van Bramer and Carlos Menchaca  
22 and Councilman Moya on the entire City Council for  
23 holding this hearing and for your incredible support  
24 over these years of all things library and therefore,  
25 all things New York.

2 This issue is obviously hugely important.

3 Alright, we're going to do stories, so, I grew up in  
4 Inwood, the Inwood branch was my branch and I'm so  
5 proud that we're about to provide a completely new,  
6 bigger, better library in Inwood with 170 affordable  
7 housing units above it and that's super exciting.

8 So, New York is home to approximately 3.2 million  
9 immigrants. Actually, that's a sort of strange  
10 sentence. New York is all immigrants. America is  
11 almost all immigrants and in these days in which we  
12 are provoked to hate and disrespect, we've completely  
13 forgotten who we are and where we come from and what  
14 we owe to the next generations to make possible the  
15 American dream in the way that it was made possible  
16 for us.

17 We're sitting here and you know, it is a sad  
18 statement that we have to remind ourselves and do  
19 more than remind ourselves. We have to yell and  
20 scream about what's going on and do everything we can  
21 to bring America back to where she should be.

22 So, as the nations largest public library system,  
23 we are of course committed to serving the immigrant  
24 population. We are committed to serving all  
25 populations with language, reading, learning,

1 cultural programs across all ages backgrounds,  
2 educational levels and ethnicities. The libraries  
3 are the most visited civic institution in this town.  
4 They are the most used and trusted in this town. And  
5 that's because we are meeting peoples needs.  
6

7 We will take you wherever you are from illiterate  
8 to Nobel laureate and help you move further and that  
9 is a glorious statement of inclusion and opportunity  
10 and respect at the core of libraries and at the core  
11 of New York. If it's my mother, tell her I'm - no,  
12 never mind.

13 So, let's see, we have - everything we do is for  
14 every New Yorker but you know, immigrants being a  
15 hugely important part of that. We particularly focus  
16 and in fact have an immigrant services division that  
17 is trying to pay particular attention to this  
18 community.

19 This morning I'd like to focus on four priority  
20 areas; information, technology and collection  
21 development, government partnerships and citizenship  
22 information, outreach and programming and the Census.  
23 And I will summarize but you have a copy of my  
24 testimony.  
25

On 2012, we launched TechConnect to provide free computer skills training to any New Yorker who seeks it. We've grown to offer over 80 different classes in multiple languages including Spanish, Chinese and Bengali and we've helped hundreds of thousands of patrons gain much needed skills in an increasingly digital world with classes available at all skill levels from how do you turn it on to how do you code.

We offer a host of electronic resources including test preparation materials, practice exams for immigrants interested in pursuing U.S. citizenship to freedom flicks and E Book online platform, and of course, we provide the broadband, the Wi-Fi and the computers that make it possible since a shocking number of Americans are on the wrong side of the digital divide or in the digital dark.

We promote our world language collections. I am happy to go into details about that amazing collection of millions of items. We have curated a Latino and Puerto Rican cultural collection and gallery. We've created the best books in Spanish for kids, a list, because we are committed to getting as we say, more people reading more and that means the library needs to focus on New Yorkers who are not

1 reading or not reading enough. And those are often  
2 in the poorest neighborhoods and that is a primary  
3 focus. In fact, it's our number one goal this year  
4 to see if we can massively increase, not just library  
5 card holders but people who are actually using their  
6 cards to read.  
7

8 Turning to government partnerships and  
9 citizenship information, we provide services  
10 including application assistance, test prep, study  
11 groups, citizenship classes and legal services for  
12 immigration related programs. With 6,000 attendees  
13 annually, to programs that offer a path to  
14 citizenship. The New American Corners, with your  
15 help and support are in every NYPL branch. We're  
16 partnering since 2015, with the United States  
17 citizenship and immigration services and the Mayor's  
18 Office of Immigrant Affairs and proud to do that and  
19 great partners. So, thank you for that.

20 We offer citizenship classes and informal study  
21 groups. Again, through those partnerships, we're  
22 able to provide free legal assistance to immigrants.  
23 Again, it is a sad statement that we should come to a  
24 place where that is necessary but it is essential at  
25 this point.

1  
2 We work wiht the Immigrant Justice Corp who have  
3 set up shop in the Mott Haven Branch in the South  
4 Bronx, the poorest congressional district in the  
5 United States. We've established in 2017, we  
6 partnered with Justice Fellows with supervising  
7 Attorney to assist applicants with removal defense.  
8 Again, amazing and shocking that that should be  
9 necessary and complex affirmative asylum application.

10 Since 2005, the until now known Mid-Manhattan  
11 Library, shortly to be the Stavros Niarchos  
12 Foundation Library when it opens in March of this  
13 year. We help those who are applying for the  
14 Diversity Visa Lottery. We work again to help New  
15 Yorkers get past the digital divide by lending Wi-Fi  
16 to people at home working with the school system to  
17 do that. And we're delighted to see that we can help  
18 people become citizens with applicants hailing from  
19 Albania to Burkina Faso, Ecuador to Mongolia and 27  
20 other countries from around the world.

21 Let's see, since 2012, our English as a second  
22 language, adult basic education and English for work  
23 classes has significantly expanded. A seven fold  
24 increase to now 15,000 seats in the last fiscal year  
25 in 39 of our locations and you will be hearing

1 similar impressive numbers from my colleagues at  
2 Brooklyn and Queens.  
3

4 We help people continue on to the ABE and English  
5 for work classes with over 20,000 attendees in the  
6 last fiscal year. We have a drop in English  
7 conversation classes for ESOL learners in 22 sites.  
8 We have opened ESOL in two correctional facilities on  
9 Rikers Island where also for the first time, the  
10 library now has physical libraries, both at Rikers  
11 and at the Manhattan Detention Center.

12 With additional funding from the City Council,  
13 we'll be able to continue to expand both formalize  
14 literacy and language instruction as well the more  
15 drop in programs. We partner with the nonprofit  
16 organization New Women New Yorkers, to help target  
17 that community. That includes resume and services  
18 such as assistance at resume writing, networking,  
19 writing workshops and public speaking, at both our  
20 mid-Manhattan and Chatham Square branches.

21 The year, we are working with contractors to  
22 bring additional language program in Urdu, Hindi and  
23 Italian. We of course also are focused on the  
24 refugee community. We've partnered with the Cayuga  
25

2 Center to connect unaccompanied immigrant children  
3 and their foster families with library services.

4 We know that there are still folks, I think it's  
5 fair to say, the libraries are the most trusted  
6 institution in this town and you know all the poll  
7 links suggest that. I recognize that maybe a low bar  
8 in terms of some of the federal issues at play. But  
9 it's one that makes it possible for us to serve this  
10 community and for them to feel welcomed and  
11 respected. But we know that there are still people  
12 who are hesitant to sign up for library cards because  
13 they don't want to provide any information. So,  
14 we've now exploring what it would look like to  
15 provide a library card to folks who don't want to  
16 provide that kind of basic contact information.

17 We will do anything to help people feel  
18 comfortable, respected and trusted and they can trust  
19 us.

20 In terms of the Census, we all know how essential  
21 this is and I had the partnership between the city  
22 and the library system. I think is a demonstration,  
23 a recognition that we are in every neighborhood. We  
24 are the place that everyone feels comfortable and  
25 it's particularly important that therefore we use

1  
2 that trust in those facilities to ensure an accurate  
3 count and we're particularly focused on the hard to  
4 count neighborhoods where again, we are sort of at  
5 the core of those neighborhoods.

6 With funding support from the city, we've  
7 recruited a manager for this project. We'll be  
8 staffing up. We will leverage community partnerships  
9 to ensure communities know that the library is  
10 welcoming space to complete the Census and to get  
11 support. We'll provide language support through  
12 frontline staff, volunteers and partner  
13 organizations. We'll provide Census kiosks and  
14 digital support because this is the first online  
15 Census and again, millions of New Yorkers rely on us  
16 for their connectivity and we'll be providing a range  
17 of programming opportunities for patrons to engage  
18 with the Census in our branches. We'll do community  
19 town halls, networkwide census open houses,  
20 especially in April 1<sup>st</sup>, the key date, and we'll be  
21 having scheduled drop-in census support programs.

22 So, we're super excited and we think we really  
23 can do this together, so thank you for that.

24 In conclusion, libraries serve as community hubs  
25 for people of all ages, backgrounds, ethnicities,

1 religious affiliations based on a very simple  
2 premise. It is the basic premise of the  
3 enlightenment and of democracy, which is everyone has  
4 the spark of intelligence and everyone should be  
5 respected and encouraged to develop that spark.

6  
7 And we know that America provides horribly  
8 unequal opportunities of that sort. The libraries  
9 simply put are our stake in the ground as a city to  
10 say, we have to equalize that opportunity and ensure  
11 that everyone enjoys it. That's why all patrons are  
12 welcome through our doors, it's why we've created  
13 trusted community relationships and partnerships with  
14 city agencies, with the City Council and beyond, and  
15 why we continue to expand those offerings. We know  
16 that we have to do this to ensure the city and the  
17 country that we aspire to be.

18 Thank you for this opportunity.

19 LINDA JOHNSON: Good morning, I'm Linda Johnson;  
20 President of Brooklyn Public Library and I want to  
21 thank Chair Van Bramer and Menchaca and members of  
22 the Library and Immigration Committees. Thank you  
23 for your leadership and thank you Commissioner  
24 Mostofi and Deputy Commissioner Samman for your  
25 visionary leadership of the Mayor's Office of

Immigrant Affairs. And a particular shout out this morning to our founder, the father of the public library movement who immigrated to the United States in 1848 at the age of 13, Andrew Carnegie.

Brooklyn Public Library has been a home away from home to Brooklyn's immigrants since its founding over a century ago. Our libraries are trusted community spaces. Once of the first civic institutions newcomers visit when they arrive in the city.

Given the current political climate, our role is more crucial than ever. Recently, a participant in one of our popular English conversation groups, put it this way. The library is a chance to escape the news and get away from the constant worries of my everyday life.

Our immigrant patrons come to our libraries because we strive to serve them in ways that are culturally appropriate. Often in their native language and our trusted staff and volunteers help smooth the way for their full participation in society.

The libraries shelves contain books in nearly 100 languages and you can hear children's story time

every week in 12 languages, including Arabic,  
Cantonese, French, Japanese, Spanish and Urdu.

More than 4,500 people take part in English  
conversation and citizen preparation groups and we  
offer free immigration legal assistance through our  
many partnerships. We distribute over 25,000 pocket  
sized United States Constitutions in English and  
Spanish at citizenship ceremonies across Brooklyn and  
on the fourth of July. A relatively new practice we  
plan to continue.

Everyone who walks through our doors has within  
them the spark of a successful entrepreneur. The  
curiosity of a child, the thrill of getting lost in a  
good book or the desire for full civic participation  
and we are proud to help bring those dreams of a full  
life to a reality.

Our aim is to provide access to library resources  
in patrons native languages, strengthen our  
multicultural collections and English educational  
programs and develop responsive programming while  
continuing to build strong community partnerships.

Last spring, a student published a love letter to  
our McKinley Park Library in her student newspaper,  
Yale University. She wrote, that she went to the

1 library every weekend as a child stating, my parents  
2 immigrated to these states in the late 90's, without  
3 any knowledge of English. No matter how much they  
4 wanted to, they could never help my siblings and me  
5 with school.  
6

7 The library offered me the opportunity to gain  
8 access to knowledge that would not have been  
9 available to me outside of this space.

10 Her story is mirrored by the thousands each year  
11 who rely on our services. McKinley Park Library is a  
12 small but bustling branch that has one of the highest  
13 circulations in the Brooklyn system. Primarily  
14 driven by patrons borrowing materials in multiple  
15 languages.

16 The city has made it possible for us to do even  
17 more. Brooklyn Public Library has nearly doubled the  
18 budget for books in language other than English. Our  
19 online catalogue has approximately 4 million books, E  
20 Books, audio books, DVD's and other media available  
21 in nearly 100 languages.

22 Beyond materials, we engage patrons with  
23 innovative programming in over a dozen languages  
24 geared toward their needs and interests. For nanny's  
25 and caregivers, we have developed fairy tale writing

workshops in English, Spanish and Russian. Russian  
writers and poets are coming to our monthly  
literature club in Sheepshead Bay.

For academics and learners, we teamed up with  
Prospect Park Alliance to launch University Open Air,  
a free popup university in Prospect Park taught by  
immigrants who were teachers and professionals in  
their home countries but for a host of reasons are  
unable to teach in the states.

An open call for academics who were trained  
outside of the United States brought in more than  
double of the expected number of qualified  
candidates. Over three weeks, more than 500 people  
attended and joined classes. One university, Open  
Air professor found a teaching position through  
connections he made during this program.

Our work with immigrants is lead by a dedicated  
team in the outreach services department. Their  
approach is to engage directly with vulnerable  
populations, identify needs, and develop services to  
meet them.

As a result, or offerings are in high demand.  
Last year for example, attendants at ESOL classes

increased by over 14 percent and our immigration  
hotline received nearly 2,000 calls.

In a touching response to the family separation  
crisis, our librarians delivered over 1,000 backpacks  
filled with school supplies and books in Spanish to  
children in New York who are here without their  
families.

These books have been used by legal organizations  
to engage children during the long waiting time  
surrounding court proceedings. Librarians also set  
up story times and craft stations for children in  
waiting rooms on legal intake days

In 2017, fear of United States Immigration and  
Customs enforcement arrests was so great. Brooklyn  
Public Library, like other institutions saw students  
dropping out of our programs as they dreaded leaving  
their homes. We responded with a Know your Rights  
workshop for ICE encounters and in fiscal year 2019,  
we trained more than 330 participants.

We assist patrons with citizenship, green card  
renewals, adjustment of status, renewal for deferred  
action for childhood arrivals and temporary  
protracted status. These services are delivered  
through a strong partnership with the city's

1  
2 NYCitizenship program and Immigrant Justice Corp. We  
3 apply this expertise strategically. When the federal  
4 decision to end temporary protected status for  
5 Haitians was enacted last year. The library  
6 responded by hosting special TPS workshops at  
7 Flatbush and Central branches with a strong Haitian  
8 community presence.

9 Over the years we have learned that many of our  
10 older patrons have a stronger desire for in person  
11 support and hotlines, so we set up walk in hours for  
12 immigrant services with no appointments necessary.  
13 These serve as a first step for our staff to connect  
14 to immigrants to other services with the library as  
15 well as a lead into appointment based resources  
16 available across the city.

17 Our vision is a Brooklyn Public Library where  
18 everyone can access information, collections and  
19 services in the languages they speak.

20 In 2015, we became the first city library to  
21 offer language line. Allowing staff and patrons to  
22 communicate in over 100 languages via telephone.  
23 This winter, we will expand language access by  
24 introducing Travis translation devices in every  
25

1 library in Brooklyn, providing an additional real  
2 time interpretation tool to enhance customer service.

3  
4 Two years ago, Brooklyn Public Library created a  
5 volunteer language bank. A group of librarians  
6 certified and formally trained in interpretation and  
7 translation services. These librarians translate  
8 print material ranging from library card applications  
9 to program flyers as well as providing simultaneous  
10 translation at BPL events.

11 As Brooklyn Public Library rebuilds a historic  
12 number of libraries across the borough, we have been  
13 conducting stakeholder engagement in multiple  
14 language. For Sunset Parks new library, the library  
15 hosted design workshops in Arabic, Chinese, English  
16 and Spanish to bring a wide swath of the community  
17 together for a design session. At New Utrecht  
18 Library, engagements were held with simultaneous  
19 Chinese interpretation. As we renovate or construct  
20 one third of our branches over the next five years,  
21 we will continue this level of engagement, accessible  
22 to the language of the communities we serve.

23 Brooklyn Public Library's 1,000 community  
24 partners are the bedrock of our ability to meet the  
25 needs of a diverse borough. One of our strongest and

1 most longstanding partnership is with the Mayor's  
2 Office of Immigrant Affairs. We support and  
3 participate in many of MOIA's initiatives including  
4 IDNYC, New American Corners, NYCitizenship, Immigrant  
5 Heritage Week, We Speak NYC and Community Resource  
6 Fairs.  
7

8 At Central Library, we are building a brand new  
9 office and waiting area for IDNYC as part of our new  
10 government services wing. Including a passport  
11 office, rotating partner space and a space for  
12 civics. It will open later this winter in time for  
13 Census 2020 outreach to Brooklyn's hard to count  
14 populations.

15 Along with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant  
16 Affairs, the library is also a convener of local  
17 coalitions. For example, the Sunset Park Community  
18 Round Table, a group of organizations and neighbors  
19 dedicated to helping immigrants meets every six weeks  
20 at the Sunset Park Library. The Round Table has  
21 collaborated on resource fairs, community surveys and  
22 programs offered in library space.

23 A meaningful new partnership with Brooklyn based  
24 non-profit Emma's Torch repurposed the Café at the  
25 Central Library. Emma's Torch provides culinary

training to refugees, asylees, and survivors of human trafficking, positioning them to begin meaningful careers in the food services industry.

As part of the Café program, students acquire skills and customer service experience as well as the opportunity to attend the diverse range of free classes at the library further supporting their educational development.

I would be remiss if I did not mention our partnership with the City Council. You are one of our closest allies from ensuring funding for our libraries and the services provided within them to hosting events, town halls and even immigration attorneys at the branches in your district. The Council truly understands the importance of libraries for immigrant populations in every neighborhood and for this, we cannot thank you enough.

Everyday, Brooklyn Public Library welcomes people to our branches who arrive in this country hungry for opportunity. We connect immigrants with knowledge of English, employment opportunities and legal assistance. Libraries provide everything from pathways to civic participation to an escape from day to day worries.

1  
2 With tensions rising in the aftermath of the 2016  
3 election, Bay Ridge Library staff who serve a  
4 significant immigrant population captured the library  
5 sentiment perfectly on a chalkboard sign outside the  
6 branch. It read, you are welcome here, you are  
7 loved. Patrons began adding their own messages to  
8 the sign. Filling it with notes written in the many  
9 languages spoken in the neighborhood. Everyone is  
10 welcome here has become the unofficial slogan of  
11 Brooklyn Public Library. It reminds us that we are  
12 here to ensure access to all regardless of language,  
13 country of origin or immigration status, a space for  
14 families to connect and a source of critical  
15 information in a changing world. We are as honored to  
16 serve immigrant communities today as we have for over  
17 one century.

18 DENNIS WALCOTT: Good morning. My name is Dennis  
19 Walcott and I have the honor of being the President  
20 and CEO of the Queens Public Library. I want to  
21 thank the Chairs Van Bramer and Menchaca and the  
22 members of this joint committee for the opportunity  
23 to testify today. I would also like to thank the  
24 Commissioner for her leadership and partnership with  
25 New York City's public libraries as well.

1  
2       So, now, before I give my formal testimony, I  
3 want to answer two things that were mentioned earlier  
4 in the introduction by the Chairs. In one, in my  
5 library experience as a child, really draws to mind  
6 the people who are probably the librarians if they  
7 were alive today saying, he's the CEO, the Queens  
8 Public Library, it's like the disconnect might be  
9 somewhat mind boggling for them. But in addition to  
10 that, I would say to the Chair to get the Chair Van  
11 Bramer's pictures, you are going to have to issue me  
12 a subpoena because we have it under lock and at this  
13 moment and only released on special occasion. So,  
14 the younger Van Bramer is always protected by us in  
15 that regard.

16       So, it's separate in the part of that. You are  
17 always welcome to see what pictures exist of the  
18 Chair and we also have pictures of other Queens  
19 Council Members who are on the panel as well in their  
20 younger days as well. So, I just want you to know  
21 that and that's why we provide information to serve  
22 your needs.

23       Yes, it helps us in the process of continuing to  
24 expand our information services to all populations.  
25 And you have my formal testimony and I will skim

1 through it because it also repeats a lot of what  
2 Linda and Toy have stated as well. But you know, we  
3 are the great equalizers in a democratic society as  
4 all of you know, any individual can walk through a  
5 library door. We don't ask your background, we don't  
6 ask your race your ethnicity, your sexual, it doesn't  
7 matter, you are always welcome to our doors. And as  
8 a result, to that, we always try to come innovative  
9 and programs to serve that population and as Chair  
10 Van Bramer mentioned, back in 1977, 42 years ago, we  
11 created the New Americans program and it was  
12 dedicated to providing comprehensive programs and  
13 services for immigrant populations.  
14

15 Almost half of the Queens residents are foreign  
16 born making this program a vital resource and just to  
17 share a snapshot of what we all do and what we just  
18 recently did over this past weekend. This past  
19 Saturday at one of our libraries we had the opening  
20 of our Caribbean Arts Festival which was a gorgeous  
21 festival where we had over 210 people coming into our  
22 library to look at the artwork on the wall and if you  
23 go to nine of our libraries including Central right  
24 now, you will see Caribbean art displayed. And even  
25 before I came here today, I stopped at Central and I

1 saw some pieces of art on the wall that was truly  
2 magnificent. I mean, it was just like over the top  
3 gorgeous and I say that because it really ties into  
4 what we're talking about today and that's to make our  
5 libraries open and welcome to all populations but  
6 also making sure that immigrant populations feel  
7 welcome and warmly engaged.

9 In addition to that, yesterday, through Nick  
10 Buron chaired it, we had at another one of our  
11 libraries, a memorandum of understanding with the  
12 Korean cultural center with that formal MOU we were  
13 able to reinforce the relationship that we have with  
14 them around providing material and books and services  
15 to populations in the Goldrick Library and other  
16 libraries in their area and our area and that's  
17 exciting as well.

18 And we work closely with our own programs. We  
19 work closely with the Adult Learner Program, the Job  
20 Business Academy and community libraries to assess  
21 local needs and link residents with existing  
22 systemwide library and social services to enhance  
23 civic engagement.

24 The New American Program organizes workshops in  
25 languages spoken by the Queens immigrant communities

1  
2 to assist new immigrants in adapting to life in the  
3 United States. Workshops cover a variety of topics  
4 that include but are not limited to job search help,  
5 entry job level training, technology training, small  
6 business development, immigration law, citizenship  
7 application, tenant rights, career planning,  
8 parenting and health, coping skills, music and dance,  
9 drama performances, bilingual poetry readings, story  
10 telling and crafts are among the cultural programs  
11 offered to celebrate the diversity of our  
12 communities.

13 Our adult learner program also offers adult basic  
14 education for immigrants covering topics such as  
15 math, reading and writing skills. It offers high  
16 school equivalency instruction for new immigrants who  
17 did not complete high school in their home country or  
18 those who have a high school diploma but it's not  
19 recognized in the United States.

20 Case management services are also available at  
21 several of our adult learning centers which provide  
22 social service assistance and referrals to immigrants  
23 for important matters like housing and accessing  
24 supplemental nutritional assistance program SNAP  
25 benefits. Queens Public Library also offers ESOL

1 classes at many of our branches and adult learning  
2 centers including conversational English classes as  
3 well as contextualize ESOL classes that focus on job  
4 searching and entrepreneurship and using new  
5 technology.  
6

7 ESOL conversation groups are also offered in  
8 select libraries for customers to practice English.  
9 The New Americans initiative, Corner initiative in  
10 partnership with the United States Citizenship and  
11 Immigration Services held and the New York City  
12 Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs dedicates a space  
13 in every single one of our libraries where immigrants  
14 can find information and resources to become U.S.  
15 citizens.

16 In partnership with the New York City Mayor's  
17 Office of Immigrant Affairs, we along with the New  
18 York Public Library and the Brooklyn Public Library  
19 participate in the New York City Citizenship or  
20 NYCitizenship program, which assists immigrant New  
21 Yorkers with free citizenship applications and  
22 financial counseling. Weekly appointments can be  
23 made with immigration attorney at our Central,  
24 Flushing and Jackson Heights Libraries. As the city  
25 transitions from NYCitizenship to ActionNYC, we look

forward to continuing the great partnership and hope  
to provide the same level of services in those  
programs as well.

Queens Public Library provides free citizenship  
classes that help customers prepare for the  
naturalization exam. Moreover, we collaborate with  
the Immigrant Justice Corp to provide free  
immigration legal assistance, status adjustment,  
green card renewal, and other related services in  
English and Spanish at our Long Island City Adult  
Learning Center.

Through another proud partnership with the de  
Blasio administration, [INAUDIBLE 1:14:06] IDNYC, New  
York signature free identification card program for  
all New York City residents and since the program's  
inception, the Queens Public Library has helped over  
220,000 New Yorkers enroll to receive their ID cards  
with over 12,400 people integrating their QPL card  
with their IDNYC card.

Undocumented immigrants often have difficulty  
obtaining government issued identification. Knowing  
this and knowing that immigrants trust our  
institutions and spaces, New York City libraries were  
and remain ready and willing and able to serve some

1  
2 of our most vulnerable communities. And just as a  
3 quick side, when I look at the stats from our  
4 libraries, obviously Flushing is number one with  
5 IDNYC. It's just off the chart with Central and  
6 Jackson Heights and others following, but Flushing is  
7 just an amazing library as far as the volume of  
8 services that it provides.

9 In addition to providing vital programs and  
10 services, we must also ensure our frontline staff,  
11 are communicating effectively with our newest New  
12 Yorkers. Every library and adult learning center in  
13 our system have both the Travis devices that Linda  
14 referred to and tablets with google translate for our  
15 staff to connect with our customers regardless of the  
16 language they speak.

17 These translation devices are crucial for our  
18 staff to properly assist customers in an efficient  
19 and timely fashion. QPL's collection contains  
20 materials in 30 languages. We actively purchase adult  
21 and childrens books and magazines and newspapers and  
22 CD movies and more. Other in our international  
23 language collections are throughout the system, some  
24 of the largest available in the United States.

1  
2       And one more quick a side and then I will wrap  
3 up. It's interesting, say for example in Langston  
4 Hughes Library, where Council Moya represents. As  
5 you know, with the founding of Langston Hughes was  
6 founded predominantly based on African Americans who  
7 lived in that community and as the community has  
8 changed, we've seen the library change. With more  
9 materials, diverse materials representing the various  
10 populations that have moved into that neighborhood  
11 and I think all of us have that example in our  
12 respective libraries as a neighborhood changes, the  
13 demographic changes, we're out in front of that and  
14 having materials and responding to that in ways that  
15 really reflect and hopefully support and respect the  
16 individuals who are moving there.

17       Our immigrants programs and services are  
18 continuously in high demand. In fiscal year 2019,  
19 QPL welcomed over 18,200 participants to our more  
20 than 8,600 immigrant focused program sessions. We  
21 hosted over 4,600 ESOL sessions, which had over 4,100  
22 participants. Our ESOL participants are seeing the  
23 results. This past fiscal year, they experienced an  
24 average educational gain of 59 percent.

In addition to our ESOL program, QPL provided citizenship counseling to over 900 individuals and completed more than 1,600 sessions. Our over 380 coping skill workshops helping newly arrived immigrants or just to American society also had over 6,200 participants.

The Job Business Academy integrated English literacy and Civics education sessions which teaches contextualizing and training for technology or home health aid jobs to over 230 individuals who produced a post test rate of 79 percent. Nearly 2,500 hours of immigration, legal assistance to 270 individuals and over 230 cultural celebration programs attracting over 6,400 attendees reinforcing our commitment to inclusion and diversity within our borough. And a lot of those programs, people who are from the communities but beyond the communities, attend the classes, the cultural programs, the dance sessions, you name it and it's really the true mixture of New York City at those events.

These programs and services we offer to our customers allow them to make real positive differences in their lives.

For immigrant New Yorker Anna Diaz, finding a free and high quality English language class where she could express herself in a safe and trusted environment was extremely difficult. She then discovered and registered for an intermediate ESOL course at the Briarwood Library. With every class, she started becoming increasingly independent and self-reliant.

She became so confident in her English language skills and was so grateful to the library for empowering her. She felt compelled to share her story and show off her new skills last year by providing public testimony at the Libraries Committee FY 2019 Preliminary Budget hearing.

Libraries as indicated by my colleagues, our trusted entities to have people to turn to when in need. Anna's story is unique to her but it highlights the role of not just Queens Public Library but all of our libraries and played in the lives of immigrant customers.

As we strive towards building a vibrant and formed cohesive and empowered society, it starts with making sure that our most vulnerable populations receive the care and services they need.

Thank you again Chairs for all your leadership.

Thank you to the City Council, to our Speaker and to the Mayor for the opportunity not just to testify but as a result of your funding, to be there for immigrant communities in New York City and always have our doors open and we truly appreciate your support. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much to all three of you for your testimony and Dennis, in particular, I want to thank you for your discretion with the photos of younger Jimmy Van Bramer.

DENNIS WALCOTT: I protect our staff members.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I have seen those photos and I want you to know I did not have any grey hair when I worked for the Queens Public Library. This is what a career in politics will do for you with all of this grey hair.

So, I want to thank you all for everything you do. I also want to recognize the members of the Cultural Affairs and Libraries Committee who are here and then Council Member and Chair Menchaca will recognize the members of his Committee.

I want to recognize Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo from Brooklyn and the newest member of our Committee,

1  
2 Council Member Mark Gjonaj from the Bronx and I'm  
3 going to hand it over to my Co-Chair Carlos Menchaca.

4 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you Chair Van Bramer  
5 and I want to welcome Council Member from Queens,  
6 both of them actually, Council Member Moya and  
7 Council Member Dromm. Thank you for being here and  
8 we also want to thank and welcome and we want to  
9 swear in Deputy Commissioner Samman and thank her for  
10 being here and representing the Mayor's Office of  
11 Immigrant Affairs.

12 It's important that we have that voice here to  
13 really kind of think about how the Mayor's Office is  
14 really supporting the work that we're doing here and  
15 that we're talking about here. And so, we're just  
16 thankful that you are here today and we can swear her  
17 in.

18 COUNCIL CLERK: Please raise your right hand. Do  
19 you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and  
20 nothing but the truth in your testimony before this  
21 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member  
22 questions?

23 COLETTE SAMMAN: Yes.  
24  
25

2 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you for that and I also  
3 want to welcome Council Member Levin as well. Thank  
4 you for being here today.

5 So, I want to start with some questions actually  
6 to the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. I want  
7 to ask a little bit about how the Mayor's Office  
8 utilizes library branches to get information out into  
9 the public in very specific rapid response ways. So  
10 much of what we heard from testimony is kind of  
11 embedded in the daily work of a library but so much  
12 has been coming down from federal government, public  
13 charge, DACA etc. Can you talk a little bit about  
14 the rapid response.

15 COLETTE SAMMAN: Sure, first I will say that MOIA  
16 absolutely loves its partnership with the libraries  
17 and thank you so much for all of the work that you do  
18 with us on a daily basis.

19 So, as we assess situations and excuse my voice,  
20 I'm losing it. As we assess situations and we  
21 understand policy changes happening and yes, they are  
22 happening on a regular basis. We see the libraries  
23 as a key community partner and like with our other  
24 community based organizations, in a very quick  
25 turnaround, we disseminate information, we assess

2 what forms or town halls or community gatherings are  
3 happening, how do we get information to all of our  
4 stakeholders in a quick way. Whose covering what  
5 neighborhoods, where do we fill in, where can the  
6 libraries fill in and then the other partners. And  
7 so, that's how it has been working and I think we've  
8 all been doing a pretty good job trying to asses the  
9 needs and getting the information out very quickly

10 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: Is there a sense of, you have  
11 three different branches here covering the entire  
12 city, how you target specific branches for certain  
13 factors and information, language etc.?

14 COLETTE SAMMAN: Sure, and I think I can use an  
15 example that Linda referenced in her testimony during  
16 the TPS with the Haitian community. We quickly work  
17 with those partners in that community to get the  
18 information out. Obviously, that's not the entire  
19 need but building off that example.

20 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: Got it. How has MOIA served  
21 as an advisor in language access to the three  
22 libraries?

23 COLETTE SAMMAN: So, Local Law does not cover the  
24 libraries. Of course, if we are asked anything and  
25 can be a partner in any way in order to help inform

1 language access services or translation, we will but  
2 I believe the libraries cover that on their own and  
3 said so in their testimony.  
4

5 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: And what are the results of  
6 the – and I know you mentioned the Local Law  
7 component. But the work that you've done already in  
8 the past for other projects. I guess what I'm saying  
9 or I'm trying to ask, is how successful are the  
10 language access conversations with the libraries and  
11 have you gleaned needs that are coming from the  
12 libraries around language access through the multiple  
13 projects that you've been working on?

14 COLETTE SAMMAN: So, if we speak specifically  
15 about programs that are running in the libraries that  
16 MOIA oversees for instance, IDNYC. IDNYC or MOIA  
17 will handle the language access needs and  
18 translations. As far as working with the libraries  
19 on these specific needs, we have a very open  
20 relationship and anything that we can do to assist  
21 with both language access or a translation, we will  
22 but I think they are best suited to answer questions  
23 regarding their needs on translation language access.

24 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: Absolutely, and we're going  
25 to get to the needs piece from the libraries.

1 Really, we're just trying to pin the kind of  
2 accountability and role for the Mayor's Office and  
3 understanding what the needs are from your  
4 prospective. How does the We Speak New York program  
5 operate within the three library branches?  
6

7 COLETTE SAMMAN: So, we speak last year, had 269  
8 classes total citywide and 99 of those classes were  
9 held in the library. So, actually 35 percent of our  
10 classes are held there.

11 The library serves as a host and a partner site  
12 for us. The way we speak operates that facilitators  
13 are volunteers. They get trained through our office.  
14 We give all of them materials to the sites and to the  
15 facilitators that they need both for the students and  
16 the facilitators to execute the curriculum and there  
17 are two seasons.

18 So, the curriculum is both written and video  
19 based. And so, the libraries have been instrumental  
20 in helping us role this out.

21 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: I want to get sense of the  
22 numbers here. You said, 296.

23 COLETTE SAMMAN: 269 classes in FY'19.

24 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: And then 99 classes happen at  
25 the -

1  
2 COLETTE SAMMAN: Of that 99 were in the  
3 libraries.

4 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: 199?

5 COLETTE SAMMAN: 99.

6 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: 99 were at the libraries.

7 COLETTE SAMMAN: Of the 269.

8 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: Of the 269 and how many  
9 people were able to access those programs in the  
10 libraries?

11 COLETTE SAMMAN: I could get back to you on that,  
12 I don't have the number of people.

13 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: On the people?

14 COLETTE SAMMAN: No, but we were in all three  
15 systems and continue to be.

16 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: How is information about We  
17 Speak New York shared in the libraries?

18 COLETTE SAMMAN: So, there is information, I  
19 believe that both our staff, our teams that are in  
20 the libraries giving outreach information, as well as  
21 the libraries to disseminate that. It is on the host  
22 sites to also do community outreach and so, again, I  
23 will let the libraries speak to their particular  
24 outreach efforts.

1  
2 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: Yeah, I think that maybe at  
3 this point, I will ask the libraries at this point,  
4 talk a little bit about the We Speak program and how  
5 the 99 classes throughout the system were accessible  
6 through your library systems.

7 And whoever wants to start, don't all jump up at  
8 the same time.

9 DENNIS WALCOTT: Let me look to our right and get  
10 more detailed information and as it comes up to us.

11 COLETTE SAMMAN: While they are waiting, I will  
12 speak a little bit. We just received an Emmy.

13 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: That's right,  
14 congratulations.

15 COLETTE SAMMAN: Yes, thank you and it was on  
16 instructional instruments, production and we are  
17 super excited about it, so is our teams and it was on  
18 one of our episodes which you can access online  
19 called, Rolando's Rights.

20 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: And it was for that one  
21 particular episode.

22 COLETTE SAMMAN: For that episode yeah.

23 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: Okay, Rolando—

24 COLETTE SAMMAN: Rolando's Rights.  
25

CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: Rights, okay, thank you for that. Is there data as we wait for them? Data on like downloads and that kind of user data?

COLETTE SAMMAN: So, we just last year probably maybe a year and a half ago moved to digital – really expanding our digital platform and we were ready to execute on that in making the website more interactive so that people could actually take quizzes after each episode. That rolled out last spring, so for people who cannot go to a site or want to access materials at home.

Since we have updated the website to allow for that, we have had about 164,000 visitors, which is amazing and we've actually, and I don't have the data on me, but we've actually had people globally access the website, which is awesome.

CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: We're teaching the world how to speak New York. Okay, please Linda.

LINDA JOHNSON: With my accent. So, in Brooklyn we speak New York classes conversation groups across the entire borough. Most recently, in Brighton Beach and Sunset Park coincidentally and the classes are promoted through other programs that we offer and also through our online calendar.

1  
2 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: And Linda, can you talk a  
3 little bit about the ways that it is advertised  
4 within the libraries. We kind of want to get a sense  
5 about the kind of experience of someone. How do they  
6 get experiences or well, you tell us exactly how.

7 LINDA JOHNSON: Well, for one thing, patrons who  
8 are participating in other programs will learn about  
9 the We Speak NYC classes there and all of our  
10 calendars, in particular, the online calendar makes  
11 note of the time of those classes and the location.

12 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: And what languages are people  
13 learning about We Speak New York? How are they being  
14 invited?

15 LINDA JOHNSON: Apparently, their offered to all  
16 of the languages that we're doing, English  
17 conversation classes. And so, I don't have a more  
18 specific answer than that, sorry.

19 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: And if the other libraries do  
20 that, I'd like to hear that as well. Thank you.

21 TONY MARX: We'll get that to you Mr. Chairman.  
22 So, we focus the We Speak NYC efforts previously, We  
23 Are New York with the videos and the programs  
24 associated with it in our drop-in English  
25 conversation classes, which I mentioned.

1  
2 So, in FY'19, we had almost 24,000 participants  
3 in a little over 1,600 sessions in 22 locations or 22  
4 of our branches. I think it may be 23 at the moment.

5 In FY'18, we served over 19,000 and in FY'17, we  
6 were at 20,000 and again, we're so grateful for all  
7 of the assistance from MOIA on this front.

8 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: And I wanted to ask a little  
9 bit about how it's being advertised. In what  
10 languages are people being invited into the space? I  
11 understand and the way that the curriculum is built  
12 within the We Speak is in English, so you are  
13 learning it in English and this is in kind of English  
14 conversational.

15 What we're looking for is a sense of how someone  
16 is being invited and is it - what language is the  
17 invitation coming in?

18 TONY MARX: Well, in our case, because we focus  
19 on sort of intermediate language capacity, we do  
20 advertise it in English, because English is what the  
21 conversations are happening in. But across the  
22 system, you know, we have trained our staff and we're  
23 using technology to ensure that we can help people  
24 who need help in any language potentially though.  
25 That means, there are a lot of languages we have in

2 our collection, 222 different languages associated,  
3 but of course, we focus on the major ones.

4 DENNIS WALCOTT: So, with Queens, we'll be glad  
5 to get back to you with specific numbers because I  
6 don't have the numbers here and I don't want to give  
7 you wrong information. But with any type of  
8 advertising, we use our various platforms to  
9 advertise our program. So, that includes our  
10 marketing department and having information go out on  
11 the website, as well as the flyers that we put up.

12 And then we've started something new in our  
13 central library where we have a board basically, a  
14 computer board, that gives all the information around  
15 the various classes and programs we offer and we do  
16 that in different languages. And then we I guess  
17 around nine months ago, developed a new website and  
18 the new website is language friendly and it really  
19 has a lot of accessible information in a variety of  
20 languages but I can't give you more details without  
21 giving you wrong details, and I don't want to do  
22 that.

23 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you for that and we'd  
24 like to follow up on that. I think the numbers are  
25 indicative of the role partnership that you have

1  
2 together with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant  
3 Affairs. A lot of money has been invested in this  
4 program and so, I think what we're trying to figure  
5 out is how we understand it and make sure that we can  
6 create more robust access to the service.

7 DENNIS WALCOTT: Well, if I may, a key point to  
8 that though is that with these sessions as well as  
9 other sessions with MOIA, they provide a valuable  
10 service to us as far as translation services as well  
11 of material. And so, we work in close partnership  
12 with their staff and our staff to make sure whatever  
13 the class maybe in whatever particular area, there is  
14 that integration of services between MOIA and for us,  
15 I imagine my colleagues, the library system.

16 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: Well, and we heard earlier  
17 that you all - well, you are not part of the Local  
18 Law pertaining to language access. You all take care  
19 of your own language access needs. And so, what are  
20 those needs and do you see them change over time and  
21 very specifically around some of the rapid response  
22 stuff that we've been as a city trying to do and get  
23 information out. What are the language access needs?  
24 Are they increasing in any way and how can - MOIA is  
25 here right now, how can we ensure that they

1 understand what those needs might be across the  
2 board?

3  
4 TONY MARX: So, I'll jump in. In that with the  
5 changing needs and the changing demographics, I mean,  
6 our librarians are always trained in professional  
7 development around what's going on in their  
8 respective communities and we put a lot of power in  
9 our managers to be reflective of knowing what's  
10 happening in their areas of service. And so, the  
11 materials reflect that, classes reflect that and  
12 adjustments are made accordingly based on what they  
13 see locally.

14 And then from Central, today is Tuesday, we have  
15 every Tuesday, PD set aside from nine until twelve-  
16 ish or so, where we go into a number of areas to make  
17 sure that our staff are participating and getting new  
18 information and material around what's happening.  
19 Whether it's language access to new immigrant  
20 populations, different type of training, equity  
21 diversity inclusion training and what that means for  
22 our society and our customer base as well.

23 So, we try to incorporate that on a regular basis  
24 on Tuesday's in our professional development in  
25

1  
2 addition to our normal class sharing that takes  
3 place.

4 LINDA JOHNSON: We're very appreciative of the  
5 services that we've been offered. I don't think it's  
6 an issue of needing more, I think the question is as  
7 we've all discussed earlier today, how populations  
8 are shifting in the borough and how language needs  
9 change in various branches depending on how those  
10 populations are moving.

11 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: And just to stay there,  
12 really quick in Brooklyn Linda and talk a little bit  
13 about how you are anticipating those changes and how  
14 quickly are you able to meet those shifts and change  
15 in language access needs?

16 LINDA JOHNSON: Well, of course, a lot of that  
17 happens because of the individual relationships that  
18 our librarians have with our patrons also, because  
19 our collections float.

20 Often, we end up seeing foreign language  
21 materials that we thought belonged over in one branch  
22 starting to pool in a different branch, which is an  
23 early indicator of what's going on in terms of  
24 language needs in different branches.

1  
2 TONY MARX: Mr. Chairman, so, you know all this  
3 but, in the Bronx, obviously focus on Spanish as well  
4 as various African languages, Bengali, French,  
5 Albanian and Italian. In Manhattan, it's again  
6 Spanish and then Chinese, French, Korean, Russian,  
7 Japanese, German, Hebrew and Italian. In Staten  
8 Island, Spanish, Russian, Italian, Chinese and  
9 Arabic.

10 We again, as Linda said, as neighborhoods shift,  
11 the constituency in the branches shift. The  
12 collections move, partly naturally through floating  
13 but also as directed when we see increased demand.  
14 So, for instance, you know, the neighborhood I grew  
15 up is now primarily Dominican. So, massive  
16 collections in Spanish, which I suspect were not as  
17 massive when I was a kid growing up in the  
18 neighborhood.

19 And not only do we move collections but we also  
20 try to move or target staff who have language skills  
21 you know, that are appropriate for each neighborhood.  
22 That may mean training, sometimes with computer  
23 assistance for translation, especially if someone  
24 doesn't have those language skills, but we're always  
25 looking for you know, our amazing talented librarians

1  
2 to be based in places where if they have those  
3 language skills, we can put them to play.

4 DENNIS WALCOTT: Currently in Queens, we're  
5 conducting a community needs assessment and asset  
6 mapping with Expand Ed and that includes analyzing  
7 demographic data as well as program data in order to  
8 identify gaps in services and programs and that  
9 includes languages as well.

10 And so, we've been very assertive in that regard  
11 and working and developing the community mapping  
12 initiative.

13 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you for sharing that.  
14 The asset mapping would be really interesting to  
15 utilize. The asset mapping sounds really interesting  
16 and I'm assuming, I don't know if that's happening  
17 across the board but the shifts are happening so  
18 fast. I guess we want to make sure that we're all  
19 concentrated on language access, which is why I took  
20 a little bit of extra time with We Speak New York as  
21 just one program and thinking about how people are  
22 accessing that program. And really thinking about  
23 how someone who might read in Spanish, might not be  
24 ready to read in English but can speak in English has

an access point that is in their language, not necessarily English.

So, this is why we want to be thoughtful about how we increase access as it continues to grow. And I'm going to hand it back to Chair Van Bramer. Even though I have a Census question to but -

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Please, go ahead.

CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: I can keep going? Thank you.

The New American Corners is an important program and I guess if I can ask MOIA this question. How are we working together with the libraries to ensure that this program and the library itself can remain safe for a space for immigrants to seek out library and community services?

This is about a safe space, how are we maintaining the libraries as a safe space for immigrants to enter and access services?

COLETTE SAMMAN: I mean, I would say that the libraries are a trusted partner. We promote the Most Trusted Partner, that's why we host so many of our programs at the libraries.

The libraries do an unbelievable job in making sure that people are respected. That the spaces that we do create are private and or have some sense of

1  
2 privacy. I can speak to the IDNYC space as an  
3 example of that. We made sure as we went from  
4 library to library, even our pop up models, that even  
5 in a very busy lobby like Flushing, there is still a  
6 sense of privacy created. There are still waiting  
7 and maintaining areas and I think that we did a lot  
8 of the set up with the libraries in the very  
9 beginning making sure that these corners were in  
10 every single branch and the libraries have done an  
11 unbelievable job maintaining that spaces as safe for  
12 all people to access.

13 Did you guys want to say anything further about  
14 that?

15 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: Well, before I get to  
16 libraries, I just want to go back to MOIA. I guess,  
17 is there like a sense of protocol or a kind of  
18 established sense of things that you just do. I  
19 think the IDNYC is a great example of this model.  
20 I'm asking about the New American Corners, does that  
21 same protocol advice, consulting, happen across the  
22 way to maintain the safe space?

23 COLETTE SAMMAN: We are in constant communication  
24 with the libraries on everything that we are doing  
25 with them. So, yes, of course, we are always looking

2 to see how we can maintain and improve any  
3 programming happening.

4 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: And so, the libraries, how  
5 has MOIA helped instruct you in maintaining the sense  
6 of safety. We all know that libraries are very, very  
7 trusted partners. We want to maintain that and  
8 that's through intentional work and a lot has  
9 happened in the last few years. How has MOIA kind of  
10 consulted with you on that work?

11 COLETTE SAMMAN: Oh, I mean, we're very  
12 appreciative of MOIA's initiative and support in this  
13 area. We're in every branch with the New American  
14 Corner and really, it's incumbent on the library to  
15 talk to MOIA about replenishing those collections,  
16 which we do annually.

17 DENNIS WALCOTT: Just to add, I think again, it's  
18 a partnership and so, we listen to them, they listen  
19 to us and as part of that partnership if things need  
20 to be improved or refined then we're always there.  
21 So, MOIA has been four square with us as far as  
22 making sure that support is given to us and around  
23 the issue of safety, I think just walking through our  
24 door, provides that safe environment just to start  
25 out with. I think the people coming to the library

1 view us that way and I think MOIA helps us reinforce  
2 that as well.

3  
4 TONY MARX: Totally agree. I want to add one  
5 other thought. I mean, I think at this moment in  
6 history and in New York and elsewhere, organizations  
7 that are focused on the immigrant experience are  
8 essential and doing amazing work under difficult  
9 circumstances and we are proud to partner with them.

10 I do think it's worth at least noting that  
11 because the library serves everyone, meaning, we're  
12 not only - I don't mean that majoritic, only focused  
13 on immigrants, we're focused on every one of which,  
14 the immigrants are a huge portion. I actually think  
15 that helps to provide the sense of trust. There's a  
16 sense that I think there are people who come to the  
17 library for services who might not be as comfortable  
18 walking into an immigrant specific location because  
19 it's identifying.

20 So, we can have programs for people who are not  
21 legally citizens or not you know, and you aren't  
22 self-identifying by walking in the library door, and  
23 I do think that's part of the power of the library.  
24 Right, that we can target programs and welcome  
25 everyone but you're not self-identifying in a way

1 that may be scary to you under these current  
2 circumstances by taking advantage and walking in.

3  
4 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: Great, thank you, thank you  
5 for that and again, we want to stay close on that as  
6 we keep increasing the relationship with the  
7 libraries as a place for implementing a lot of the  
8 programs that we are talking about here, including  
9 the census.

10 So, many of you mentioned, all of you actually I  
11 think mentioned the census work. The \$1.4 million  
12 that we allocated earlier this year were really to  
13 target that need. Is there anything more that you  
14 can tell us on exactly that process you may have  
15 already developed for library users to fill out the  
16 census. Anything that's specific in design that you  
17 can share with us now and give us a glimpse of?

18 TONY MARX: So, for instance, this notion of  
19 kiosk. So, we'll have staff dedicated to helping  
20 people with the census and they will have technology  
21 with them that will be dedicated to that that also  
22 ensures privacy, so that we get rid of the fear  
23 factor. Thank God we've gotten rid of the horrible  
24 citizenship question which was designed to keep  
25 people from filing out the census, which is mind

1 boggling. And in addition to the \$1.4 million of  
2 city funds, thank you, and working closely with the  
3 Mayor's Office of Census Outreach as well as ABNY and  
4 other partners, the New York Public itself is putting  
5 about over \$600,000 of our own funds, in private  
6 funds towards this effort.  
7

8 LINDA JOHNSON: So, actually appropriately, I  
9 think we're having a teaching tomorrow on the census  
10 at our Central library but we have created a whole  
11 team of people that are focused on this issue alone  
12 for the next year and a little less than a year now,  
13 I guess.

14 And it involves not only what's happening in each  
15 of our branches with technology and people who are  
16 trained to assist and assistance comes in different  
17 levels depending on the sophistication of the  
18 particular patron. Whether they need tech assistance  
19 or already sort of comfortable filling out forms  
20 online. But also, we're very focused on outreach and  
21 our partnering with other organizations throughout  
22 Brooklyn. So, that anytime we know there will be a  
23 gathering of people, whether it's in our neighbors at  
24 the Brooklyn Museum or the garden or the park, we  
25 will be sending outreach librarians with dedicated

1  
2 tablets to those events to make sure that we can also  
3 get people to sign up even if they're not coming into  
4 the branch.

5 DENNIS WALCOTT: So, at Queens, we just hired our  
6 new Civic Engagement Manager who will start in two  
7 weeks and that individual will begin working with our  
8 community outreach and program and services  
9 department to created a cohesive comprehensive  
10 outreach strategy. We'll be hiring, I will have  
11 started to hire ten new outreach staffers who will  
12 focus exclusively on census related outreach efforts,  
13 especially in the 40 identified hard to serve areas.

14 In addition to that, we are in the process of  
15 identifying those specific, very detailed challenged  
16 areas and making sure that we have services available  
17 through our libraries and those areas in terms of  
18 connectivity and making sure computer access is  
19 available. We will have as we indicated before,  
20 translation devices at all of our libraries to make  
21 sure we are able to do that.

22 Participating with other community based  
23 organizations and making sure information is shared  
24 through TRYLY[SP?]. We've been working very closely  
25 together as far as our coordination around census

1 along with the city, along with all the various  
2 partners at the city to address that. Participating  
3 in a form on Thursday as a matter of fact, talking to  
4 a number of organizations around the Census 2020 and  
5 what it means.  
6

7 And the other layer that we're doing and I  
8 imagine my colleagues as well, we all have our  
9 friends groups as well. And so, we've identified our  
10 friends groups as ambassadors for Census 2020 and  
11 they'll be doing outreach and they know their  
12 particular areas and how we'll dispatch them to bring  
13 in more people to make sure they're participating one  
14 way or another and also, through our professional  
15 development with our libraries and our managers  
16 making sure they have all the up to date information.

17 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: And to come up with a fine  
18 point on language access, how are people being  
19 invited to these spaces that are Census related and  
20 that they all have a very microtargeted way to get  
21 whatever communities around that library and those  
22 languages spoken by people to come into that teaching  
23 or that kiosk.

24 And so, that's something we want to be monitoring  
25 as well with you and just cognizant of. My last

1 question on Census and I'm going to hand it over to  
2 the Chair is about security. I think one of you  
3 mentioned about securing data and information and how  
4 you were able to describe the steps that you are  
5 taking to ensure that everyone's information is going  
6 to be secure. And I'm assuming that's a real issue  
7 for all of you.

9 And so, talk a little bit about how important  
10 that is for people and the users of libraries to have  
11 that conversation and how important has it been in  
12 your history as you've kind of moved into technology.  
13 And what will you be doing to describe that  
14 cybersecurity priority to individuals doing the  
15 census online and really anything actually.

16 And then, what manual, have you put any kind of  
17 manual together for all the librarians across the  
18 system? Does that exist as well as a way to go back  
19 to that for reference?

20 LINDA JOHNSON: I'll jump in here; this seems to  
21 be the topic of the month. And I want to underscore  
22 that security and privacy is something that we've  
23 taken seriously for a long time. And that while some  
24 of the tablets and the new devices that we're buying  
25 particularly to increase capacity during the census

1  
2 period will be dedicated to that particular function  
3 that all our computers in fact are secure. And that  
4 all of the data, whether it's data that's being  
5 submitted in the census form or whether it's other  
6 work that patrons are doing on our computers is  
7 secure and that it's a high priority for the library.

8 I think that the challenge here in making  
9 decisions around whether computers should be  
10 dedicated specifically for the census because of the  
11 sensitivity of that information. In some ways,  
12 undercuts the work that we've been doing on this  
13 issue throughout the borough, throughout time. And  
14 in fact, it's always been forefront and center at  
15 Brooklyn.

16 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: And how are you communicating  
17 that to people? How are you explaining that?

18 LINDA JOHNSON: This is something that we're  
19 just, I said, this seems to be the issue. This is  
20 something that we're working on as we're speaking now  
21 because it has become a significant issue in the last  
22 few weeks.

23 TONY MARX: So, just what she said. Look, the  
24 simple fact is we maybe the last major institution  
25 left that strenuously believes in and protects

1  
2 privacy. It is a core mission for us. The most  
3 obvious way to describe that is arguably our most  
4 valuable asset. The thing that we have that we could  
5 monetize, is we know what everyone's reading and we  
6 destroy that information as soon as the book comes  
7 back. We don't want to have that; we don't want to  
8 have it even if somebody comes looking for it.

9       Similarly, while we increasingly try to measure  
10 and have metrics and assess our programs and audience  
11 etc., we never cross the line to saying you have  
12 identify yourself if you walk in the door or you walk  
13 into our program. I mean, so the library is really  
14 committed to this and of course, we recognize it's  
15 our obligation to double down when it comes to the  
16 census because of the sensitivity around those issues  
17 and we'll be training our staff as well as our  
18 dedicated census staff on how to address those issues  
19 and we'll be looking at how to publicize that an  
20 reassure people.

21       DENNIS WALCOTT: And just to add one other point,  
22 in that I think with all of us, we invest a  
23 significant amount of money in our IT departments or  
24 the whole area of security and not just around census  
25 and it really is part of our bread and butter and our

2 basic existence as far as protecting information and  
3 you can't say anything is 100 percent guaranteed but  
4 at the same time, we put a lot of emphasis in that  
5 and really do cross partnerships with the TRYLI  
6 experts as well as people outside of our TRYLI  
7 network to make sure that we are front and center  
8 around security.

9 LINDA JOHNSON: Not to beat this issue to death  
10 but I do want to add that it goes to the trust that  
11 we've all been talking about this morning and it's  
12 really what we pride ourselves on. That our patrons  
13 can come and trust us and if we weren't focused on  
14 this issue, we'd always be in danger of losing that  
15 trust.

16 And I would also add that as we learn how to  
17 communicate with our patrons in whatever language  
18 their most comfortable, all the while assisting them  
19 with their English language skills, the census is  
20 being woven into all of our communications as the  
21 form becomes due.

22 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you for that and I  
23 think that there is no doubt that you are all focused  
24 on the cyber security. You have been focused and now  
25 the census is putting it even more at the front and

center as a topic but the kind of harder part is how we communicate that to communities that may not have technology savvy understandings about security and the different protocols, but that message has to be communicated.

So, let's just keep connected on that. I'd like to kind of hear more and work with the Chair to help spread the message when that message has been crafted. And how we can ensure that people trust and continue to trust the institutions for census. Thank you.

Oh, Mathieu Eugene was here as well. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. First of all, listening to Chair Menchaca's questions and all of your answers makes me appreciate the staff of all of your systems ever so much. Because all of those services and all of those questions and all of that care and concern for immigrant communities and indeed, everyone that you serve, it's the staff at front line. It's the staff that they see at the circulation desk. It's the staff that are at the Adult Learning Centers and so, I just want to mention that. Because as I was listening to all of that, I

1 was thinking about all of those front line staff  
2 members who people trust and who come to actually  
3 love, right.  
4

5       There is a deep bond between the staff of the  
6 library and the communities that they serve and I  
7 witnessed it first hand. And speaking of staff, I  
8 have never seen the external affairs, government  
9 affairs folks more running up and down here. It's  
10 like a run on those little yellow pieces of paper.  
11 They probably ran out of them somewhere at Central.

12       DENNIS WALCOTT: And they're secured now and  
13 destroyed as well.

14       CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: That was my job for  
15 eleven years, I never made that many runs up to the  
16 dais. But I do want to ask a few questions  
17 obviously, everyone knows how much I care and love  
18 about libraries but Tony, you mentioned the issue and  
19 the thing that you're are looking into, discussing  
20 around the issuing of library cards without  
21 identifying information, the normal information that  
22 libraries have always sort of requested when someone  
23 applies for a library card.

24       How close are we to maybe achieving that goal and  
25 making sure that no one is failing to seek a library

1 care for fear that they might have to give  
2 information. Because it's sort of a number that you  
3 may never know right, how many people don't even do  
4 it, because they've seen their friend fill out the  
5 application and they don't want to go there.  
6

7 DENNIS WALCOTT: So, Mr. Chairman, this came out  
8 of I think one of the reasons it emerged for us is  
9 last year, our sort of number one system goal was to  
10 significantly increase the number of library card  
11 holders. Which this year, has moved to having  
12 achieved that. I think 23 percent increase in one  
13 year, which is significant from a large base. This  
14 year, it's getting people to use the cards to read  
15 more right. And not just being passive on that front  
16 but being proactive about it in more ingenious ways.

17 But as we were focusing on the library cards, I  
18 think our frontline staff, who are fantastic, they  
19 are the ones who came back to us and said, there are  
20 people who are resisting this because they are scared  
21 and that generated the conversation where we said,  
22 you know, could we have a library card that doesn't  
23 require the identifying information. It will  
24 probably have less borrowing privileges associated  
25 with it but you will still be able to borrow books

1 and do anything else that the card makes possible.  
2  
3 And our plan is to pilot it and we are piloting it in  
4 Park Chester and at 125<sup>th</sup> Street right now and we'll  
5 assess that and my guess is, we'll go systemwide  
6 after that.

7 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: George Escany[SP?] has  
8 steps for the day by the way at this hearing. And  
9 what is piloting look like exactly. So, you said  
10 this particular version of the card may have fewer  
11 borrowing privileges associated with it.

12 DENNIS WALCOTT: Less total number of books at a  
13 time but as long as you are returning them you keep  
14 going.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay.

16 DENNIS WALCOTT: And I think that you know, a lot  
17 of this is about relying on our frontline staff to  
18 say, oh, you don't have a card. Would you like one?  
19 Which we've gotten much more used to. Oh, you're  
20 concerned about it, here's another option or even  
21 before concern is raised, this is another option if  
22 you would like it. Right, and doing that in person  
23 as well as on the web and you know, signage, all of  
24 those things.

25

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, if the pilot is  
successful, then we take it further.

DENNIS WALCOTT: We are in the knowledge sharing  
business. That's what we do, so of course we want to  
maximize that and we want to get rid of any  
constraints on it.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Great, so now of course  
I have to ask the two systems if they are equally  
interested in taking a look at your pilot.

TONY MARX: So, a couple of things, when I'm  
always listening and learning and so, we always take  
information back in all seriousness because I think  
it's great in different types of initiatives and  
programs. We do do this for temporary housing. So,  
for the individuals who may not have a permanent ID  
or residents or anything on that line, we issue those  
types of cards. And I think of one person I always  
site, I haven't seen him for a while as a matter of  
fact, but Waldo is his name and Waldo was living in a  
variety of different locations and he would come to  
the library at Central and read at least nine books a  
week and to sit and read and read and read. And we  
engaged in our conversation and started talking and  
then Waldo said, I don't have a library card and he

1 said, I didn't think I could get one. I said, yes,  
2 you can.

3  
4 So, we do that for temporary housing and so,  
5 we're very proud of that. And we do notice though  
6 especially in Corona where a number of people will  
7 not get the cards out of fear as well, of having  
8 information identified. So, we're going to explore  
9 it and I was listening to what Tony was talking about  
10 and it is fascinating and I'm not opposed to it.

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: It would seem like a  
12 particularly good thing to do in Queens in so many  
13 ways. Obviously, every one of the five boroughs but  
14 as you mentioned I think in your testimony, at least  
15 half of our population is foreign born.

16 LINDA JOHNSON: I await the results of Tony's  
17 pilot.

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Good, as do we. It  
19 sounds like something really important. Now Dennis,  
20 I was there at the launch of your new tag line, Linda  
21 referenced the unofficial.

22 DENNIS WALCOTT: We Speak Your Language.

23 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Of the Brooklyn Public  
24 Library but Queens has a new permanent tag line, We  
25 Speak Your Language and I wanted to ask, number one,

1  
2 I guess all three systems, the staff speaks so many  
3 languages in of themselves. Do you have a sense of  
4 what those numbers actually are and what languages  
5 the staff speak? Because that's such an incredible  
6 resource and I know how diverse the staff is in all  
7 our library systems.

8 You may not have it; I see the staff going -

9 DENNIS WALCOTT: No, I was going to say, we don't  
10 even expect the staff to come up to us with that  
11 information at all.

12 LINDA JOHNSON: But we will get you that  
13 information.

14 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Interesting to know, I  
15 just don't even know if you've done it but you know,  
16 if the staff at the Queens Public Library speak 52  
17 different languages, that would be amazing and I  
18 think something to promote and brag about right,  
19 because you literally speak so many different  
20 languages.

21 So, no need to work over the yellow pieces of  
22 paper on that one but we can get that later. In term  
23 of though We Speak Your Language and the website,  
24 right, which is in so many different languages. How  
25 is that going? How is that being received and if the

1  
2 other two systems want to chime in on what they do in  
3 terms of – well, not having the same slogan, but  
4 doing the same or similar work.

5 DENNIS WALCOTT: So, the feedback I've received,  
6 the website has done extremely well. I mean, both  
7 the platform purpose of being easier to access  
8 information. The time in turning it around as well.  
9 I think the vibrancy of the color pallets that are  
10 being used and I think, all the goals that we wanted  
11 to achieve for the website. Obviously, working out  
12 any bug that we hear about or feedback that we hear  
13 about.

14 We're doing that in real time, so it's been  
15 really good and I think people have gained a better  
16 understanding of We Speak Your Language because it's  
17 not just a literal language but it's figurative  
18 language as well of individuals in making sure people  
19 have a clear understanding of that.

20 Today is Tuesday as I said, yesterday we started  
21 at It's Time for Kind project and so It's Time for  
22 Kind has been marched through our website as well, as  
23 well as through the program initiatives.

24 Yesterday, we had several programs at Central,  
25 we're branching out to the other branches to make

1  
2 sure we have acts of kindness and then what we  
3 started either last year or two years ago, was post  
4 its throughout all of the branches of people posting  
5 acts of kindness including school children and  
6 reinforcing that and then we capture that on our  
7 website as well.

8 So, we're doing all these things and integrating  
9 it through the We Speak Your Language and making sure  
10 that people have a clear understanding on what's  
11 going on. I think it's going well.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Is it powered by Google  
13 Trans-

14 DENNIS WALCOTT: Now, you are getting into  
15 definitely above my pay grade as far as technology is  
16 concerned but I mean, we use Google translate at the  
17 libraries. How are system is powered, I always defer  
18 to people to give me a better understanding.

19 TONY MARX: In addition to the language skills of  
20 our staff, at the frontline and the branches, staff  
21 are all trained to have devices and to use Google  
22 translate when there's a challenge in terms of  
23 communicating with folks, so we're totally into that.

24 LINDA JOHNSON: I don't have much to add to that,  
25 only that we've all had the benefit of hiring from

1 within our communities and therefore hiring people  
2 who are multilingual in a borough where over half the  
3 households are speaking a language other than English  
4 at home. And it's important today, it will be  
5 important in the future. It's always been sort of  
6 our bread and butter and the only thing that's really  
7 changing is the way technology is helping us reach  
8 different languages and more and more people who are  
9 learning English as a second language.  
10

11 DENNIS WALCOTT: And if I may chair, to just give  
12 a shameful plug to the City Council as a result of  
13 the City Council allocation, it has allowed us to  
14 hire more folks as well. And folks from various  
15 backgrounds and that type of funding, especially with  
16 the unrestricted nature of the funding, as of Queens  
17 and I imagine my colleagues, given us the ability.  
18 We have postings all over the place and then having  
19 the two universities, library universities, Queens  
20 college, there it give us that richness and diversity  
21 and the word of mouth and so, maybe gaps that we had  
22 existing before we're filling now as a result of the  
23 City Council funding and the importance of that  
24 funding in the future.  
25

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right, let me just  
3 assure you, there is no such thing as a shameful plug  
4 for the New York City Council.

5 LINDA JOHNSON: He meant a well deserved plug.

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah, we will take it  
7 wherever we can get it. So, look, we were talking,  
8 yesterday we had a big briefing on this hearing and  
9 when I worked at the Queens Public Library, I bragged  
10 about this and I've bragged about it ever since Lacey  
11 Chan[SP?], I don't know if she is actually still with  
12 the Queens Public Library, but when I worked there  
13 was the demographer of the Queens Public Library.  
14 And I just loved the work in the research that she  
15 did right. And that was really geared at making sure  
16 that we anticipated even the population shifts that  
17 would take place in various neighborhoods and that  
18 the collection development strategies were geared  
19 towards emerging populations even.

20 And in some ways, I think it was groundbreaking  
21 work and it was so exciting to see that the library  
22 cared that much to make sure that we were purchasing  
23 childrens materials in languages and from countries  
24 that we knew young mothers might be taking their  
25 children to Sunnyside or Corona, or Glen Oaks.

1  
2 Do we still do that kind of work? Is that part  
3 of how we make sure that the actual collections  
4 themselves are also meeting the needs of immigrant  
5 communities and also speaking those languages?

6 DENNIS WALCOTT: So, with Queens, we no longer  
7 have a demographer on staff but we do a lot of that  
8 frontline work through our managers and also,  
9 assessing it through the various departments at  
10 Central. And as I mentioned before, we're doing this  
11 project with Expand Ed, which is really taking a look  
12 at the demographic data and mapping it with the goal  
13 of then going after funding because I would love to  
14 have somebody who was specific to that research  
15 analysis and demography of communities and how it  
16 reflects even better programming. Because then that  
17 lays the foundation of going after more grants that  
18 be a part of city funding to provide the funding for  
19 those gaps.

20 So, that's what we're in the process of doing  
21 now.

22 LINDA JOHNSON: So, you know we actually have  
23 heard a horrible rumor that Joe Salvo, the City  
24 Demographer is retiring.

25 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Oh, really?

2 LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah, is that true?

3 Heartbreaking, the guy is really a just treasure and  
4 has more to contribute and certainly to our systems  
5 but probably to every agency that he touches.

6 But in terms of language and of being particular  
7 sensitive to the needs of our patrons, I think in  
8 terms of children in particular, we focused in the  
9 last year on making sure that our story time is being  
10 hosted in now twelve languages every week. So,  
11 there's always a place for parents to bring young  
12 children regardless of their primary language.

13 TONY MARX: So, just to sort of make a full  
14 circle here, our primary reliance in terms of this  
15 data is from the census. So, we also have an  
16 interest not just financial, not just citizen but in  
17 terms of our own analytics, so that we can track it.  
18 But then, you know, the frontline staff are tracking  
19 it. We track in terms of where the collections are  
20 floating in terms of languages trying to anticipate  
21 that and we do have an analytics team that's in the  
22 president's office for the system to do that as well.

23 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah, so, Dennis in your  
24 case, even if you don't have the title Demographer,  
25 although it's good to see Nick smile and Lacey Chan

1  
2 is still with the library. But we still are doing  
3 that work and making sure that we are meeting the  
4 needs of the communities in every way possible.

5 And I think not everyone knows how incredibly  
6 interesting I think the collection development teams  
7 are at library systems and that they are literally  
8 purchasing materials from all over the world. Going  
9 to other countries, going to book fairs and other  
10 things and other countries making sure that they're  
11 selecting titles and books and then making sure that  
12 they are coming back to Queens and Staten Island and  
13 Brooklyn. It's an incredible thing when you think  
14 about how much work goes in to making sure that all  
15 of the right information in all the right ways is  
16 coming back home here, which is just amazing.

17 DENNIS WALCOTT: That's why the Chief Librarian  
18 and the team plays such an important role because I  
19 think when you look under the hood and find out how a  
20 library actually works, it would boggle the folks  
21 mind as far as all of intricacies and details that  
22 you just referred Chair, that go into the selection  
23 of books, the materials, programs and how one has to  
24 make adjustments based on the changing demographics

1 of neighborhoods and what that means for the system  
2 overall. So, you are correct sir.

3  
4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah, I mean, obviously,  
5 I could talk about how much I love libraries for days  
6 but it's fun to talk about it with folks who maybe  
7 are a little bit less intimately associated with our  
8 public libraries.

9 Oh, I know what I wanted to ask. So, some of you  
10 mentioned in your testimony, some did not the exact  
11 numbers of folks who are in the ESOL classes getting  
12 and receiving those services, learning how to read,  
13 write and speak English for free. Which is such an  
14 incredibly important service that libraries provide.

15 But I also know there's like a ton of interest.  
16 Not everyone gets in and sometimes there are waiting  
17 lists and that you could provide even more of those  
18 services if you had the space and the resources.

19 So, is everyone getting in? Is there more  
20 interest than there are slots? And, is it a matter  
21 of resources or space? Obviously, you're doing some  
22 of these services in the meeting rooms at the  
23 libraries. Some of them are very small but some of  
24 you gave your testimony how many folks are in the  
25 program but I guess, I'm interested to know if we are

1 meeting the need? If we are turning anyone away and  
2 not the library turning them away in a way that you  
3 would desire but that you just simply can't  
4 accommodate everyone who is looking for services for  
5 free at the public libraries.  
6

7 TONY MARX: So, as I think I mentioned in my  
8 testimony or at least it's in my testimony even if I  
9 didn't mention it. Since 2012, we've increased our  
10 English language you know, offerings, the spots in  
11 them 700 percent.

12 So, you know, we're really working at this. I do  
13 not hear about people turned away from English  
14 language classes. I think the only major program  
15 that I'm aware of where we do have a waiting a list,  
16 is for coding classes. Which is a twelve week very  
17 intensive you know, sort of full on program.

18 But my guess is offering more, we'd find more  
19 takers. Another example of our commitment to this  
20 is, as we approach the opening of the library  
21 previously known as the Mid-Manhattan, we will have  
22 an entire floor focused on education programs,  
23 particularly adult education programs, and that means  
24 English language as well as computer skills.  
25

1  
2       And the reason we're doing that at 40<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> is  
3 because the neighborhood is filled with folks who are  
4 working in offices, in hotels, in restaurants, who  
5 look to the library as a way to gain skills to move  
6 up.

7       And not only will we have a whole floor for that,  
8 but it will be connected to a whole floor to help  
9 people find jobs, to create jobs.

10       DENNIS WALCOTT: He's just showing off, I'll tell  
11 you.

12       TONY MARX: Hey, you do what you got to do.

13       DENNIS WALCOTT: Just showing off.

14       LINDA JOHNSON: In Brooklyn, we have two  
15 different types of language classes. We have  
16 specific classes where the sign up and repetitive,  
17 you know, weekly or more frequent meeting but then  
18 also, we have drop in classes. Many of which are  
19 staffed with volunteers and we use those as a way to  
20 try and make up for the fact that we have limited  
21 spaces in the more formal class.

22       DENNIS WALCOTT: So, at Queens, we are turning  
23 people away and it's mainly through the Central  
24 operation because of space constraints as well as  
25 funding constraints at times as well. Because

1 demand, as you can imagine, in that area especially  
2 also in Flushing as well and Jackson Heights.  
3

4       You know, we just get an influx of individuals  
5 and so, Queens, we're in little nooks and crannies of  
6 the Central Library at all different hours and in the  
7 evening, we're offering programs on the second  
8 floor. Even at Central, which is mainly the offices.  
9 So, we'll set aside some of our meeting rooms up  
10 there and then during the day we'll use the rooms in  
11 the teen section, where the teenagers are supposed to  
12 be in school. And so, as a result of that, we are  
13 really tight in a number of our libraries because of  
14 demand and the populations are just changing.

15       And I think the beauty of it is, is that the  
16 success of the program generates additional interest  
17 on the people. So, the word of mouth spreads not  
18 just through the formal network but through the  
19 underground network as far as you can get this type  
20 of service and as you all know, when people  
21 sometimes, especially in Queens, with the two  
22 airports being there, come off the plane, they go to  
23 a library. I mean, that's the place they know and  
24 that's the place they trust.  
25

2 And so, the demand really is high. So, we can  
3 meet that demand with additional funding but also, we  
4 have to take a look at our internal space allocations  
5 and how we do it and also, balance the other needs of  
6 the library as far as space allocation that's a  
7 concern.

8 TONY MARX: Can I just add, if I may Mr.  
9 Chairman, so the thing about the Bronx Library Center  
10 which is our second, right now, our largest branch.  
11 It's typically our second largest branch. You know,  
12 we have a whole floor for English language  
13 instruction. It looks like the UN or what the UN  
14 should look like and really dramatic. I will never  
15 forget going, showing a donor this space to get some  
16 more support and we're sitting there and a woman,  
17 covered woman suddenly stands up and walks towards me  
18 and then, gets on her knees. And I am like, what is  
19 going on and I realized it was prayer time and I was  
20 standing on the eastern side of the room.

21 I mean, it's just incredible what goes on and you  
22 know, as we all have increased our education  
23 programs, we find parents coming in for English  
24 language while there kids are doing homework help or  
25 afterschool programs. This has changed how we build

1 libraries and we're all again with thanks to the  
2 support of the City Council and being in the tenure  
3 capital plan finally after I don't know a century.

4 That we still need the open floor plans for the  
5 library space but increasingly we're recapturing or  
6 adding space with program appropriate classrooms.

7 Last story, I remember when we were about halfway  
8 through this, I went to visit the Bronx Library  
9 Center and I remember Michael Alvarez, who I'm

10 shocked is about to retire, showing me around and we  
11 turn a corner and he starts apologizing for the fact  
12 that there is a class. I think it was English  
13 language class, that's taking place literally in a  
14 hallway because we've run out of space. And I had to  
15 assure him that there was nothing to apologize for  
16 that that was the best thing I had seen ever, and you  
17 know, we keep going.

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah, so, before I turn  
19 it back over to Chair Menchaca, who I think has a  
20 final question or two.

21 You know, I think the Adult Learning Center's  
22 piece is such an important function here and I am  
23 reminded that about twenty years ago, when I worked  
24 at the Queens Public Library, we celebrated the  
25

1 formation of the friends group, the First ever  
2 friends group at the Steinway Adult Learning Center  
3 in Astoria and at the Charter ceremony for the  
4 friends chapter, several of the students who formed  
5 the board spoke. And I remember a woman saying that  
6 she came to Astoria Queens and didn't know any  
7 English and didn't really know anyone else, but in  
8 walking around the streets, was able to meet someone  
9 who she could communicate with. And she said, I  
10 don't know where to go or what to do to figure out  
11 what I'm going to do here.

12 And the woman said to her, go to the library. If  
13 you go to the library, they will help you and they  
14 will teach you how to speak English and she said,  
15 that's exactly what I did. I walked right up into  
16 that library, found the Steinway Adult Learning  
17 Center and she learned how to speak English and she  
18 gave a speech that night which brought many of us to  
19 tears. And I think that's another one of the million  
20 stories that you could tell about the public  
21 libraries and the work that you do for and with  
22 immigrant communities.

23 So, thank you and I know we can and should always  
24 do more and we've done some really good things in  
25

terms of funding over the last several years.

Obviously, we want to keep that progress and momentum going, but thank you.

CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you Chair for that story and that real recommitment to civic engagement but also civic education, and that happens in our libraries. And one of the most exciting, so many exciting programs, but one that touches me even more deeply is participatory budgeting. And a lot of that work is and has been happening in our communities through our district offices in our district engagement, which is a voluntary process right now, but there's this big citywide thing as well and maybe this is a question to MOIA as well as the libraries. What and because immigrant communities find it as a way to engage with power to make decisions about the budget and the libraries have been a big partner for us.

So, talk a little bit about PB, Participatory Budgeting and any future work that is coming down from the Mayor's Office in terms of their process and what you've learned so far. How you were getting invited to that work and any insight that the Mayor's

Office of Immigrant Affairs or the libraries can kind  
of give us on that topic.

DENNIS WALCOTT: No, no, I mean, let me talk  
about PB for a second because I think PB has been a  
lifeblood of our local library branches in that, I  
think through the respect of those branches and  
through the involvement of the local council member  
as well. The relationship has been very strong and  
that we benefit.

I mean, we can give you an exact breakdown of the  
libraries that have benefited from participatory  
budgeting, but I can tell you we are always getting  
feedback about the participation level of people  
selecting libraries with very specific detailed  
projects and we try to honor that commitment as far  
as the money that's been allocated through  
participatory budgeting.

So, I mean, I can get you - I'm not sure if they  
have it, but I can get you more detailed information  
on how we've benefited.

CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: And that's the Council side.  
Anything that's coming down in terms of information  
about the citywide process that is by the Charter is  
supposed to kind of launch in July. Both of those

1 things, both the current City Council project PB  
2 initiative and then the citywide stuff.  
3

4 LINDA JOHNSON: I mean one of the ways that's  
5 sort of two sides of the coin, of course we benefit  
6 when libraries are allocated funds through  
7 participatory budgeting.

8 But also, we make sure the libraries are there  
9 for specific council people who want to hold meetings  
10 about the process. So, it's a place where people can  
11 come and learn about what their responsibility and  
12 their rights are.

13 TONY MARX: Mr. Chair, so of course, we're  
14 involved with PB and we're grateful for that and not  
15 just for the funding, but for the way in which that  
16 channeled the sort of democratic sense of engagement  
17 of the citizenry and empowers them.

18 In terms of civics, we're generally, I just want  
19 to say, we're there as we have moved now into the  
20 census. We created a manager for civic engagement  
21 and community partnerships as part of the census work  
22 and we want to build from that. And we actually  
23 have, we have a new chief branch library officer.  
24 Carol is here, who is the Intern Chief and through  
25 her guidance and working together with Brian, we're

1 actually, this is a live issue right now. Which is,  
2 how can the libraries go the next level of helping  
3 the next generation understand how our systems work  
4 and how they can make them work for them.  
5

6 So, for instance, we've been learning about the  
7 Los Angeles Public Library, which creates teen  
8 councils in branches and instead of having them  
9 advise on what color paint for the walls, they pick a  
10 local problem. A park that's in bad shape or you  
11 know, whatever it is and actually try to solve the  
12 problem.

13 So, rather than sort of lecture them about like,  
14 here are the three branches of government, which is a  
15 rough sell said the former political science  
16 professor, it's okay, let's learn how the system  
17 works by actually making it work.

18 And so, we're looking at those issues and my  
19 guess is we will be launching more initiatives of  
20 that kind.

21 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you for that. I think  
22 that kind of settles my curiosity around  
23 participatory budgeting, but if the Mayor's Office  
24 has anything to say about the citywide work and  
25 really thinking about how immigrants and libraries

1 connect to this larger now city charter mandated  
2 thing. If there is anything that you've been working  
3 on so far.

4  
5 COLETTE SAMMAN: So, we're excited about it but I  
6 have to get you more details on the plan.

7 CO-CHAIR MENCHACA: Okay, so we'll come back to  
8 you on that. We'll put a request in for more  
9 information there. And I just thank you all for the  
10 work and dedication you have for our communities, all  
11 our communities in today's specific focus on  
12 immigrants and libraries. I just want to say thank  
13 you and thank you to the Chair for that.

14 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you all very much.  
15 We obviously will be hearing from you again as we  
16 enter the new year and go into a new budget cycle but  
17 I want to thank my Co-Chair for his love of libraries  
18 and his lunchbox story, which was absolutely  
19 adorable.

20 With that, we are adjourned. [GAVEL]

21

22

23

24

25

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 April 1, 2018