**Public libraries have been, and will continue to be, the most democratic of institutions, offering free educational services and resources to every New Yorker**

**Statement by Bridget Quinn-Carey**

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**Testimony before the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations jointly with the Committee on Finance and the Subcommittee on Libraries; New York City Council Fiscal Year 2015 Executive Budget Hearings, June 3, 2014**

Good Morning. I am Bridget Quinn-Carey, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating

Officer of the Queens Library. I want to begin by thanking the City Council and these

committees for the opportunity to testify today, including: City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-

Viverito; Council Member Julissa Ferreras, Chair of the Finance Committee; Council Member

Jimmy Van Bramer, Majority Leader and Chairman of the City Council Committee on Cultural

Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations; Council Member Costa Constantinides,

Chair of the Subcommittee on Libraries; and Council Member Mark Weprin, Chair of the

Queens Delegation.

We are incredibly grateful for your unwavering support, which has sustained the quality of

public library service in this City over the last half a decade of very difficult budget cycles. Year

after year, as annual proposed budget cuts threatened to dismantle the system of public libraries,

as we know it, this council spoke up, stepped up, and made libraries a priority. It is only because

of this support, and the very large restorations made each year, that we have maintained fiveday-

per-week service in every community we serve and maintained core services that our

customers rely on.

Today, we have an incredibly exciting opportunity for the people of Queens. The Library opens

the door to opportunity for all we serve; with your support we can deliver real results for young

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learners, young adults and for adults of all ages and backgrounds. Together, we can make a real

difference tackling some of the biggest challenges we, as a City, are facing.

Just last week, I had the distinct honor of officiating at a ceremony celebrating the graduation of

more than 50 of our Queens Library students. These adult learners had turned to the library for

free adult education classes preparing for the High School Equivalency exam. They took

advantage of classes, small group learning and access to resources and computers. Last week, we

celebrated their graduation, as each of them achieved their High School Equivalency Diploma. I

could not have been more proud of these students, and the library team that helped them along

their way. One of the graduates told the audience that she was a new immigrant only 3-1/2 years

ago. She came to the library to learn some English. Today she is enrolled in community college.

She said, “I believe that my dream will come true because the Flushing Library gave me the

confidence in the very first step.” To perform every day miracles like that, we must keep our

doors open as many hours as possible.

In 2008, New York City public libraries were funded to be open 6 days a week in every

community in Queens. Queens customers enjoyed a 45 hour per week schedule delivered by a

full time workforce of nearly 1200. The materials budget was about twice what it is today. Since

that time, a series of large budget reductions, spurred by a faltering economy, began and

continued for the next six budget cycles.

Despite the very formidable work of the Council and the Mayor to restore the worst of the

proposed cuts, reductions were sustained, both at budget adoption annually and through mid-year

“PEGS” to meet budget gaps. Since 2008, the Queens Library has sustained a 17% reduction in

funding. This has resulted in a loss of over 250 positions, the slashing of the materials budget by

over 50%, and the reduction in average weekly hours to under 40 hours a week. For our

customers, it means long wait-times to borrow materials. Today, roughly two-thirds of Queens

residents do not have a library open on a weekend in their community.

Our goal, very simply, is to restore the funding lost since 2008, bring back employees, bring

back full shelves, and open the doors in every community for customers to benefit from the

critical resources they can only get when their library is open. One in four library customers

comes to the library just to use the public access computers. When our doors are closed, they

simply have no other alternatives.

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The opportunities before us are only achievable with your support, and we are encouraged by the

current budget proposal. We are grateful to Mayor de Blasio for proposing an Executive budget

that sustains the baseline of the FY ‘14 council restoration. We are additionally grateful and

encouraged by the council’s response to that budget, with a request for an additional $35 million

to New York City public library funding this year, which gets us halfway there. This represents a

significant turning point in that for the first time in many years, we can have a conversation

about what more libraries can do in every community.

New City funding for Fiscal 2015 will translate directly into jobs, with the hiring of new

employees to keep libraries open, and the purchase of materials. With a full, citywide addition of

$65 million over the Executive budget proposal, we envision a vast increase in weekend service;

meeting the community demand for 6 day a week service in every single Queens Library,

facilitated by the filling of approximately 250 positions.

In addition, the materials budget would see a much needed increase. Since 2008, significant

changes have occurred in the way that libraries deliver information. Increasingly, customers are

demanding digital materials, such as e-books. The loaning of digital materials is up significantly.

For libraries, this creates an additional challenge of providing both digital materials as well as

print materials, in effect doubling the demands on the materials budget. Queens Library is also

providing users with access to mobile devices on which to take advantage of digital materials,

lending devices, including Google Tablets, for free, with a library card. This adds expense; but it

is an important way Queens Library helps our users keep pace with the ever-changing digital

information landscape.

Your investment in people, in jobs for children’s librarians, teen librarians, adult librarians,

custodians, clerical staff, youth counselors, adult literacy teachers, case managers and all the

staff who deliver high quality library service, will be returned many times over in your

communities as library doors are open on weekends and residents gain more access to

computers, resources, technology training, English classes, adult education, programs and so

much more. The need for more access to all these resources the library offers is clear. The

weekend hours are particularly critical for working families.

The library continues to innovate and deliver programs that meet the evolving needs of our

communities. The Queens Library’s Job and Business Academy is a growing part of our

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programmatic offerings, responding to the urgent needs of job seekers and small business

owners. Last year, we welcomed over 20,000 people to job search and small business support

programs and 3.3 million free computer sessions. Every additional hour that the library is open

presents an opportunity for thousands of job seekers to get online. This is especially important

for people who do not have Internet access at home. While this program is successful, it is only

available in 14 locations. Scaling it to make it available in every location is crucial.

Afterschool support also remains a top priority for the Library, providing an enriching

environment for students assisting them along their academic path. In Queens, attendance for

young adult programs doubled between 2002 and 2011. We are now welcoming nearly 450,000

students annually. Expanding this core service for children and teens after school requires

funding to hire new Children’s and Teen librarians and Youth Counselors.

We are also expanding early learning opportunities. In addition to the traditional library offerings

for the very young (such as Toddler Learning Centers and story hours and the STEM-learning

focused experience of the Children’s Library Discovery Center), the Queens Library is proud to

share with you today that we have been awarded the opportunity, through the competitive

process of the Department of Education, to provide Universal Pre-Kindergarten classes as part of

the citywide initiative. This initiative will tap into some of the great unrealized potential of

libraries as community-based early learning centers.

Last year, Queens Library provided English Language Learning or Adult Basic Education to

7,900 learners. In addition, we are a pilot site for administrating the new online High School

Equivalency exam. We know, however, that the need in these areas far exceeds what we can

offer in a borough whose population is almost half foreign born. Beginning to restore six-day a

week service will begin to make these objectives a reality. We are enormously proud of all our

community libraries, their programs, and the value they deliver for the community. We also

know it is imperative to protect the investment in the physical space.

The Queens library operates 62 community libraries, seven adult learning centers, the Children’s

Library Discovery Center, the Far Rockaway Teen Library, and two Learning Centers.

The Queens Library is currently engaged in one of the most successful capital renovation and

expansion plans in its history, delivering modernized, technology-equipped facilities for

customers and staff. Currently, the library is underway with a series of expansions, renovations

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and new facilities that will better meet the needs of those communities. Key projects include the

expansion of the Kew Gardens Hills Library, the expansion of the Rochdale Village Adult

Learning Center and new library buildings in Hunters Point and Far Rockaway. In addition, the

library continues to upgrade infrastructure as funding is committed. Ensuring that buildings are

watertight and that the air conditioning and heating systems are functioning properly to allow

libraries to serve as City heating and cooling centers, is critical. We are currently conducting

infrastructure upgrades at several libraries.

However, many unmet capital improvement needs remain across the borough. These include

both critical infrastructure such as roof replacements, elevator and ADA upgrades as well as

expansions and renovations, which many communities have long sought. In total, the FY ‘15

capital needs for the Queens Library totals over $287 million. Critical infrastructure needs (that

is, exterior envelope, ADA access and HVAC replacements) totals $18.6 million for FY 2015.

This investment in the physical infrastructure is critical and valued in the community. We

consistently see rises in usage as libraries are modernized and renovated.

Even a brand new library is useless if its doors are closed. Every single additional hour we are

open means thousands of added opportunities for a customer to access information on the

Internet, to ask a question, to prepare to take the High School Equivalency exam or to attend a

community program. Every dollar invested in libraries creates dozens of new learning

opportunities.

Public libraries have been, and will continue to be, the most democratic of institutions, offering

free educational services and resources to every New Yorker. Now is the ideal time to reinvest in

the people that make our City libraries great. We know you face some tough negotiations ahead.

As you do, we urge you to remember the testimonials you heard today about how libraries

literally change lives.

Again, I thank you for the support you have shown our institutions during the toughest of times.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.