



Statement by Dennis M. Walcott, President & CEO, Queens Public Library

New York City Council Committee on Finance,
jointly with the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations

Oversight Hearing - Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2027

May 26, 2026

Good afternoon, Speaker Menin, Deputy Speaker Chair Dr. Williams, Chair Lee, members of the esteemed committees, and Council Members. My name is Dennis M. Walcott, and I am the President and CEO of Queens Public Library (QPL). It is a pleasure to be here to discuss the FY27 Executive Budget.

After years of receiving one-time funding that made it incredibly challenging to plan for the outyears, we are thrilled that the FY27 Executive Plan restores and baselines funding for the three library systems. **The City Council has long championed libraries and advocated for baselining, and we are truly thankful to both the Administration and the Council.** This investment is an important first step in ensuring proper, sustained investment in NYC's Libraries and recognizes the vital role libraries play in the lives of all New Yorkers.

Especially in these profoundly uncertain times, we remain committed to being anchors of our communities, where people can count on us for access and opportunity. Last month, the Cambria Heights Teen Center hosted its annual prom attire giveaway, where young people browsed through 1,600 donated dresses, shoes, ties, suits and accessories while also attending workshops to ensure a fun and safe prom night. Our Job and Business Academy (JBA) recently held a job fair at Flushing Library, connecting more than 600 job seekers with prospective employers.

Queens Public Library is preparing for *Summer at the Library*, a Tri-Li initiative aimed at encouraging learning and growth throughout the school recess, and we anticipate serving meals at nearly 50 branches this summer in partnership with NYC Public Schools. Staff are also coordinating engaging activities to celebrate the country's 250th anniversary and the World Cup, including book lists, programs for all ages, and more. Next month, we are recognizing individuals who completed the Library's professional childcare and home health aide certification trainings with a graduation ceremony. As with all our offerings, everything is free and open to the public.

With the Executive Budget restoration, **Queens Public Library's ongoing unmet need is now \$9.6 million.** We face escalating costs, such as contractual and insurance premiums, supply and maintenance needs, inflationary pressures, and unexpected expenses, in particular the NYC PICA prescription drug benefit program, which will cost approximately \$1.2 million this year alone. These expenses will undoubtedly divert funding from essential operational areas. We need to replace and add new print materials to our physical collections and spend more on e-materials to respond to customer demand. E-collections generally cost more than print materials, and prices continue to rise. Last fiscal year, our circulation rose by 25 percent.

Expense funds are crucial for supporting our facilities and capital portfolio. Building repairs and IT infrastructure that are deemed capially ineligible require the use of expense dollars. If a building's infrastructure fails, such as



an HVAC system, we need to rectify the situation immediately so the library can open to the public. In FY25, we lost 442 public service hours due to unplanned closures linked to building issues.

Having our unmet needs addressed would enable us to provide our users with more efficient service: for example, more books and materials in our collections, which would improve wait times; the ability to hire branch and support staff, resulting in enhanced public service and programming; upgrade IT networks to ensure safe and updated systems for internal and external use; and reinforcing our buildings to avoid infrastructure issues and unplanned closures.

Thankfully, the City Council has traditionally allocated expense funds to the three systems to help with our unmet needs through its Library Subsidy Initiative. Your continued support would make it possible for us to strengthen our operations and services.

As we look towards the future, we are hopeful about the prospect of significant increases in library investment, such as the proposed 0.5 percent of the City budget to the three library systems. This funding would make libraries even more accessible to New Yorkers, optimizing our operations and allowing us to extend hours, hire much-needed staff across departments, expand programs to meet demand (such as ESOL classes with current wait lists of 2,000), and offer more books, computers and other essential library resources.

The Executive Budget includes a capital allocation to replace the Broad Channel Library. We are grateful for the opportunity to construct a resilient building that can withstand extreme weather events. **In FY27, QPL's remaining capital need is \$252.5 million.** Our libraries are aging and need to be modernized and renovated to evolve with future generations, with respect to programmatic space as well as building infrastructure. An investment by the Administration of \$150 million for QPL (part of a larger \$450 million citywide ask) will allow us to fully rehabilitate select locations and cover urgent project shortfalls, strengthening the entire borough's system.

Because of the investments made by the City Council, in particular the Queens Delegation, and all our city leaders, library capital projects are progressing. The Hollis, Astoria, Arverne, Rego Park, Baisley Park, and Lefrak City libraries are currently under construction, promising brand new, reimagined spaces for the communities they serve. QPL has 37 active projects with the NYC Department of Design and Construction (DDC), and the Council's generous unrestricted capital allocation is key in helping us bridge shortfalls as soon as we are notified by DDC. So far this fiscal year, QPL covered shortfalls totaling \$35.2 million on DDC-managed projects, helping to maintain the integrity of the project schedule. **We respectfully ask that this support is reauthorized in FY27 in the amount of \$10 million.**

Public libraries are centers of learning, connection, and opportunity. Our trusted and dedicated staff are here for the people of New York, whatever their circumstances, whatever the issue. A participant in our Mail-A-Book program recently told us: "[I am] wheelchair bound in a facility, [and I] just turned 70. This program is my lifeline. The people are so kind... Many of us rely on you."

We know and appreciate how much libraries mean to the millions of New Yorkers who rely on us each day. And we know that with investment, we can continue to build an informed, equitable, and livable city for all.

Thank you for your continued leadership and thank you for the opportunity to testify today.