

To: New York State Complete Count Commission
Re: Public Forum
Date: March 11, 2019

My name is Terry Kirchner and I am the Executive Director of the Westchester Library System (WLS), one of the 23 cooperative public library systems in New York State, comprised of 38 member public libraries that are located within the geographic boundaries of Westchester County. I lead the WLS Complete Count Committee and I urge the New York State Complete Count Commission to support the \$40 million funding request for library based complete count initiatives across the state.

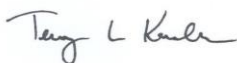
Libraries are trusted institutions with locations in nearly every community throughout the State. The key elements of trust and easy access position libraries to play a major role in making sure that individuals of all ages and from all communities are counted in the 2020 Census. To achieve this goal, we must invest in libraries so that they can increase community awareness and understanding of the census process. Libraries are the perfect organizations to tell the census story and explain why full participation matters to each and every individual, their family and their communities. Libraries connect and engage with the Hard-to-Count (HTC) communities. The relatively small statewide investment of \$40 million has the potential to protect over \$73 billion in federal funding and can protect the voting power of historically under-counted populations.

The 2020 Census survey was designed for individuals who have easy and quick Internet access. Libraries can help communities achieve a complete count through their ongoing efforts to bridge the digital divide. Individuals will go to their local libraries to complete the census if they do not have Internet access. Statewide, at least 18% of households lack Internet access or rely on dial-up access. According to multi-year Sienna Research Institute data, 25% of NYS households earning less than \$50,000 annually indicate that their local public library is their primary point of Internet access.

The need for digital access and digital literacy support will only increase as public libraries and their communities prepare for the 2020 Census. The request for \$40 million statewide funding will allow libraries to upgrade technology infrastructure to meet the hardware and software demands of the online 2020 Census. These upgrades include providing enhanced cybersecurity to protect personal information, increasing bandwidth to provide Internet access and hiring additional IT staff. Public libraries will also experience an influx of individuals needing assistance in connecting to and completing the online census. It is estimated that statewide an additional 150,000-175,000 library staff hours will be required to help individuals access and complete Census 2020.

A modest \$40 million investment in libraries today will result in a more financially secure New York State that can better support the quality of life needs and democratic rights of all its residents over the next ten years.

Respectfully submitted,



Terry L. Kirchner
Executive Director