



New York State Complete Count Commission Hearing

May 1, 2019

Good evening. My name is Tara Lannen-Stanton, Director of Adult Learning at Queens Public Library. On behalf of our President and CEO, Dennis Walcott, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today. Every day, Queens Public Library (QPL) provides the broadest range of services to New Yorkers of all ages from all lifestyles. We operate 65 locations, affording us the ability to serve every community in the borough of Queens. QPL is uniquely positioned to reach and connect with Hard to Count (HTC) populations. People in hard to count communities come through our doors on a daily basis to utilize services ranging from Adult Basic Education classes to citizenship clinics to job training workshops. This is true for many public libraries across the state. We strongly believe that if the state is serious about achieving a complete count of its residents, public libraries must play a central role, and we must receive dedicated funding in order to accomplish this task. Therefore, I urge the New York State Complete Count Commission to support the \$40 million funding request for library-based complete count initiatives.

Public libraries are one of the most trusted institutions in the United States. We are well-positioned to educate and inform the public about the 2020 Census. Approximately 48% of Queens residents are foreign born, speaking more than 200 languages and hailing from over 90 countries. A recent Quinnipiac poll indicated that 47% of New Yorkers who were not born in the U.S. would likely fill out a Census form if they heard about it from their local library.

With adequate support, libraries can augment existing public access technology resources to provide a safe and secure way for communities to complete the digital census. One in five households in Queens do not have broadband Internet access. The Siena Research Institute found that 25 percent of New York State (NYS) households earning less than \$50,000 annually identify their local public library as their primary point of internet access. Funding will allow libraries to enhance cybersecurity safeguards, provide dedicated response terminals, and increase bandwidth where needed.

Libraries across the state, including Queens Public Library, are working with our local complete count committees to make sure that HTC communities are represented. We are actively planning strategies to address many of the issues posed by the 2020 census including:

- language barriers for residents whose first language is not English via our ESOL classes, multilingual staff throughout the system, and use of translation devices
- concerns about cybersecurity and online privacy, since 80% of people will first be directed to the census form online;
- fear of completing the form due to anti-immigrant sentiment and the possible addition of the citizenship question (reaching out to the students in our ESOL and citizenship classes; explaining why the census is important and that funding for many of the services they take advantage of is contingent upon a complete count)

The 2020 Census will determine how billions of dollars in federal funding are allocated, as well our political representation in Congress. An investment in library-based outreach and engagement will allow Queens Public Library and other systems across the state to provide a safe and more secure online experience and help NYS achieve a complete count of its residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.