

Testimony

From: Scott Jarzombek, Executive Director
Date: 5/7/2019
Re: 2020 Census

I would like to thank the members of the New York State Complete Count Commission for the opportunity to speak to you today. I am here as the director of this capital city's public library district, as well as Albany and Rensselaer counties' "central reference library."

In 2018, Albany Public Library provided 215,233 computer and Wi-Fi sessions to the public. We estimate we have anywhere from 10,000 to 20,000 unique users of our internet and network. As I left the library this morning, there was a line of people at the front entrance of our Washington Ave. Branch. The majority of those individuals were waiting to use our computers.

We have moved to an online age, where taxes, job applications, and even communication with teachers have moved to online portals. While this is a natural progression, creating efficiencies and reducing waste, it is also a stark reminder of the digital divide that we see in many of our communities. In Albany, we find many of our fellow citizens left on the wrong side. It is not just a lack of connectivity. There is also an absence of the necessary skills to use this technology, or what we call in the field "digital literacy."

Albany's libraries will naturally become the primary place for individuals in the community come fill out the census. We are trusted institutions centered in the heart of many neighborhoods, and a number of those are in zip codes that are identified as "at risk tracts." Our libraries have the hardware and the infrastructure, but also the human resources to help guide in the process.

My concern as the Executive Director of this capital city's library is that of organizational capacity. Libraries nationally have become the Swiss Army knife of municipalities, almost always rising to the challenge of the communities needs. As resources are reallocated in cities, town, and county governments, libraries often find a way to provide a prior need. We are often, as the organizations who reside on the main street, the ones who recognize new challenges and opportunities. We are the canary in the coal mine. That is why you will see and hear from so many of us over this process. It is essential that APL and other libraries across the state are provided with the support that we will need as we play a crucial part in this fundamental process.

In closing, the library is the primary community resource for connecting people to the internet. We realize that with the changes being made to the 2020 Census, we will see an increase in people visiting our libraries to use our public computers and Wi-Fi, and for assistance in completing their Census questionnaires. We plan on working with the City of Albany and our multiple community partners to make sure we are up to the task of ensuring that Albany Counts and that its residents are provided with their fair share of support for services that benefit our entire community.

Yours,



Scott Jarzombek, Executive Director