



UPPER HUDSON LIBRARY SYSTEM

Together. For Better Libraries.

To: New York State Complete Count Commission

Re: Public Forum – Written Testimony

Date: May 6, 2019

My name is Tim Burke and I am the Executive Director of the Upper Hudson Library System (UHLS), one of the 23 public library systems which together connect and strengthen all 756 public libraries in New York State. The UHLS service area covers Albany and Rensselaer Counties and includes the 29 public libraries with 36 locations across the two county area. In addition to my role with UHLS, I am also currently serving as the Immediate Past President of the New York Library Association, so I have an added role and responsibility to speak up for all libraries in New York State. I want to take this opportunity to urge the New York State Complete Count Commission to recognize the central and critical role that public libraries must play in the 2020 Census and to join us in advocating for robust funding support for libraries to give them the tools necessary for New York to achieve the most complete count possible in this important process.

Libraries are trusted institutions that welcome everyone. According to 2016 Pew Research data, almost 90% of US Adults view libraries as “safe places”. Libraries are the primary, and sometimes the only, source of internet access for many New Yorkers. In fact, 25% of New York State households earning less than \$50k annually indicate that their local public library is their primary point of internet access. Libraries are open and available to the public in nearly every community throughout the State. Almost 99% of New York State’s Hard to Count (HTC) tracts are within 5 miles of a library and in New York City, 100% of the City’s HTC communities are within one mile of a library.

The key elements of trust, digital access, and ubiquitous proximity position libraries to play a major role in making sure individuals of all ages from all communities are counted in the 2020 Census. But to achieve this goal, we must invest in libraries so that they can fully engage with their communities to build awareness, to help people understand the census process, and to complete the count. Libraries are the perfect organizations to tell the census story, to explain why full participation matters to each and every individual, family and community, and to assist people with the process.

New York’s libraries are excited to play this role, but they cannot do it without additional support. Full access to the available statewide census funding will allow libraries to upgrade technology infrastructure to meet the hardware and software demands of the online census, including providing enhanced cybersecurity to protect personal information and increasing bandwidth to provide adequate Internet access in all libraries. In addition, it is estimated that statewide an additional 150,000-175,000 library staff hours will be required to help individuals access and complete the census, so the hiring of additional training and support staff is something that can only be done with additional resources.

New York State has made a relatively modest \$20 million investment in statewide census support through the Empire State Development Corporation. For the reasons explained above, a significant portion of those funds must be directed to libraries. I once again urge the New York State Complete Count Commission to advocate for robust financial support for New York’s libraries as your partners in making the 2020 Census 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,

Timothy G. Burke

Executive Director
Upper Hudson Library System