



Testimony before the NYS Complete Count Commission

Smithtown, NY

April 12, 2019

Good afternoon. My name is Caroline Ashby and I am the Director of the Nassau Library System, which coordinates services for the 54 public libraries in Nassau, creating efficiencies and better experiences for library users.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I would like to demonstrate that complete count efforts need to go beyond outreach and education. They need to extend to the mechanics of implementation. Long Island is very lucky to have capable CBOs, like HWCLI, able to organize across interest groups, and I have the pleasure of serving on many of the Nassau and Suffolk complete count subcommittees. But when it comes time to actually take the census, libraries are where people will come for information, access to technology, and one-on-one assistance. Public libraries will be the primary venues outside the home for census-taking.

For hard-to-count New York communities including seniors, immigrants, and low income families, libraries are already positioned as trusted providers of ESL classes, safe afterschool spaces, and job skills support. Across NY State, 100% of hard to count populations live within 1 mile of a public library.

Census 2020 will be online for the first time. Populations subject to undercounting disproportionately lack broadband internet access at home. Public libraries are the only institutions already providing free access to technology and digital

literacy instruction to all. Nassau's public libraries provided 1.5 million internet sessions on our public computers last year.

We know from experience with tax forms, applications for public assistance, and Medicare enrollment that as government processes move online, the onus of digital literacy support falls to public libraries. That's wonderful--it's what we're here for--but it is both time and labor intensive. Serving the expected influx of community members seeking census support will require additional staffing and resources.

There are security risks associated with the digital census, too, and populations with low digital literacy are more susceptible to online scams. Libraries can provide a safe and secure online process and maintain the privacy of users. Thanks to the existing IT capacity of libraries, technology upgrades can be made quickly and efficiently with a modest level of funding.

Some advocates say that preparing for the digital census isn't necessary because other means of census-taking will be available. But the extent to which paper questionnaires will be available is still an open question and federal outreach will stress the online census. When people most at risk of being undercounted hear that the census is online, libraries will be where they turn for information and hands-on assistance.

Last year alone, Nassau's public libraries had 9.6 million visits. I urge the Commission to recognize the essential role of libraries in executing complete count efforts and ensure that we can provide the necessary staff, technology, and online security. Libraries are organized, ubiquitous, well-used, and ready to serve. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Ashby', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Caroline Ashby, Director
Nassau Library System