

**STLS Testimony:**

The New York State Complete Count Commission Public Hearing

April 18, 2019

Subject: The role of libraries in the Southern Tier in achieving a complete count for the 2020 Census

Purpose: To describe the critical role that libraries will play in gathering a complete count for the 2020 Census, especially as we consider the challenges that participation in an online Census will bring. Libraries will offer computer and internet access, in addition to assistance with completion of the Census, by nature of offering a free, communal space in communities across the region.

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My name is Keturah Cappadonia; I am the Outreach Consultant at the Southern Tier Library System (STLS), which serves 48 public library outlets in Allegany, Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben, and Yates counties.

More than 24 million Americans do not have internet access at home. “Older adults, rural residents, racial minorities, and those with lower levels of education and income are less likely to have home broadband. America’s libraries are the leading source of

no-fee public access to the internet, Wi-Fi, computers and technology training”.<sup>i</sup> As we prepare for a 2020 Census that will be largely digital, libraries are well-positioned to serve as community hubs for those who do not have access to the internet or internet connected devices at home.

In 2018 only 86% of households in New York State had a computer, and only 78% of households had a broadband internet subscription. Locally, from 2013-2017, 27 % of Allegany County’s households had either no internet access or dial up-only<sup>ii</sup>. “According to a recent analysis from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, a public library is located within five miles of 99% of the hard-to-count Census tracts identified with the lowest response rates in 2010—and 79% of the time, a library is within a single mile”.<sup>iii</sup> Libraries can bridge the digital divide. For example, at the Southern Tier Library System, we have partnered with the Southern Tier Network to provide affordable broadband connectivity across three counties.<sup>iv</sup> In 2010, Southern Tier Network (STN) began designing, building and operating a dark fiber Internet infrastructure in Chemung, Steuben and Schuyler counties. The network is now fully established, and continues to expand. More than 500 miles of fiber have been constructed to connect rural communities to Broadband Internet.<sup>v</sup>

Additionally, libraries offer a place to overcome barriers to access for individuals living below the poverty line. ‘In the Southern Tier, more than 72,000 people are living at the federal poverty line or below’.<sup>vi</sup> In our service area, 26% of children are living below the poverty line.<sup>vii</sup> The free programs our libraries offer reach an audience of thousands of children and families annually. As such, we are well positioned to help enable an accurate count of children ages Birth - 5.

During the 2010 Census, libraries hosted more than 6,000 official Census outreach sites.<sup>viii</sup> Libraries also offer a public space that can function as temporary workspaces

for Census staff, as well as for community stakeholders to host events related to the 2020 Census. Established existing relationships with other agencies and organizations assisting the traditionally underserved, place libraries in a unique position to help facilitate a count of all citizens.

New York State's public libraries are uniquely positioned to assist in ensuring an accurate count, especially in our rural areas where libraries are centers of community, activity, learning, entertainment, and access to information. They are integral and respected parts of community networks. And they have existing technology infrastructures to support digital access and security with friendly, trusted, and knowledgeable staff. With this framework in place, public libraries are capable of and very willing to do the hard work toward ensuring an accurate enumeration if we are entrusted with adequate funding and support to take on this task.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/sites/ala.org.advocacy/files/content/ALACensusBrief.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/ny>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/sites/ala.org.advocacy/files/content/ALACensusBrief.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.southerntiernetwork.org/>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.wellsvilledaily.com/news/20180301/allegany-county-receives-267m-in-broadband-funding>

<https://map.nysbroadband.ny.gov/html5viewer/?viewer=broadband>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.mytwintiers.com/news/local-news/homelessness-in-the-southern-tier/1816920031>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/ny>

<sup>viii</sup> <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/sites/ala.org.advocacy/files/content/ALACensusBrief.pdf>