



The Power To Imagine

To: New York State Complete Count Commission
Re: Public Hearing, Utica, NY
Date: April 24, 2019

My name is Wanda Bruchis and I am the Executive Director of the Mid York Library System. Mid York serves a population of over 370,000 through 43 public libraries, many of which are located in small or rural communities, often serving as the sole resource for access to broadband services and fulfilling information requests.

Libraries provide outreach services to the same populations as those identified as being historically undercounted: people who are educationally or economically disadvantaged; geographically isolated; seniors; and those for which English is not their primary language.

It is crucial that every New Yorker is counted in order to strengthen our political representation in Washington and ensure our fair share of federal funds for essential programs. To achieve this goal, libraries across New York State have collaborated with elected officials, agencies, and non-profits who work directly with Hard-to-Count communities.

For the first time, the Census will be conducted digitally, creating challenges in access, digital literacy skills, and trust in government that may undermine its accuracy. Since we do not have a local Census Office, the residents of Herkimer, Madison and Oneida County are at an even more significant disadvantage. This makes our local libraries a critical resource, positioned to address some of the biggest obstacles identified in achieving a complete census count.

Digital Access

Currently, our member libraries have nearly 400 computers used to provide broadband access¹ to the public. Our libraries reported over 500,000 computer and Wi-Fi sessions during a one year period.² This is important since over 20% of New York households do not have an Internet subscription and will rely on public access to complete their census survey.³

¹ 100mbps, minimum.

² According to the most recent NYS Annual Report for Libraries (2017)

³ U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Digital Literacy Skills

More than 60% of adults over the age of 50 need help in setting up or using a new electronic device.⁴ Every day, library staff assist individuals in learning basic technology skills and in achieving greater digital literacy proficiency.

Trust in Local Libraries

Libraries have always stood by their commitment to the right to privacy, intellectual freedom, equal opportunity, and the public good. This commitment has made public libraries the most trusted resource for information; more trusted than friends, local news organizations, and more trusted than government sources.⁵ When it comes to something as critical to our future as the Census, our communities will trust and rely on their local library.

Libraries have an innate understanding of the importance of digital equity and are trusted organizations for many. In the words of my colleague, Terry Kirchner, an “Investment in libraries today will 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.”⁶

Respectively Submitted,



Wanda R. Bruchis
Executive Director

⁴ [Tech Adoption Climbs Among Older Adults](https://www.pewinternet.org/2017/05/17/tech-adoption-climbs-among-older-adults/). By Monica Anderson and Andrew Perrin for the Pew Research Center. May 17, 2017. <https://www.pewinternet.org/2017/05/17/tech-adoption-climbs-among-older-adults/>

⁵ [How people approach facts and information](http://www.nextlibraries.org/2018/03/in-libraries-we-trust/), by John B. Horrigan for the Pew Research Center. September 11, 2017. <http://www.nextlibraries.org/2018/03/in-libraries-we-trust/>

⁶ Terry Kirchner, Executive Director of the Westchester Library System Testimony at the March 11th Complete Count hearing.