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**Testimony of Kevin Verbese, Director,
Suffolk Cooperative Library System**

**To the New York State Complete Count Commission
William J. Lindsay County Complex - William H. Rogers Building
April 12, 2019**

Good afternoon, my name is Kevin Verbese and I am the Director of the Suffolk Cooperative Library System. On behalf of our fifty-six member libraries I would like to welcome you to Suffolk County and thank you for all of your efforts and your involvement with the New York State Complete Count Commission.

It goes without saying that the 2020 Federal Census is critically important to Suffolk County, Long Island, and New York State. We who serve the public are, and should be, responsible for ensuring that New York has a full and complete count of every single one of our residents. The health, safety, security, and livelihoods of our citizens and communities are dependent on it.

Public libraries are particularly well positioned to assist in ensuring a complete count and they stand ready, willing, and able to do so.

Here in Suffolk County we have sixty-three public library buildings spread around our 912 square miles. No resident of Suffolk County lives more than seven miles from a public library. Suffolk's public libraries have over two thousand highly trained staff members available to assist library patrons. In 2017 there were 11,835,029 visits to public libraries Suffolk County and local

residents and visitors used the 2,090 computers in our libraries 2,053,037 times.

But libraries are not about numbers, and they are not about statistics, and they are not about books...public libraries are about people. What libraries do, better than anyone else, is connect people to resources, information, knowledge, and wisdom.

The connections that our libraries and librarians have with the communities they serve are deep, trusting, and respectful. People feel safe at their local library and they feel safe using their local library. Libraries are committed to patron privacy and digital security. The right to privacy is ingrained in everything we do.

People who will be hard to count in this census - those without access to computers or high speed bandwidth, those in economic distress, and those fearful or who may gain access to their responses - are exactly the people that libraries reach on a daily basis.

Libraries already have in place the essential pieces of infrastructure that will be needed to guarantee a complete count. Libraries have the space, computers, bandwidth, digital security, and staffing that will be essential to counting all New Yorkers.

While libraries stand ready to assist with the 2020 Census these are challenging times for our libraries. New York State has underfunded public libraries for far too long. Libraries receive less in total State support today than they did a decade ago. In fact the budget that was passed in Albany last week cuts more than 34% of direct New York State Aid to Suffolk County's public libraries.

While libraries recognize the critical importance of ensuring a full count and they are planning - and excited - to step up and lead

local complete count efforts, underfunding will impede their ability to do even more.

I would ask this Commission to support libraries – financially – by recommending that a significant portion of available funding go to public libraries to assist them with providing the space, computers, bandwidth, digital security, and staffing that will be needed ensure that every single New York State resident is counted in the 2020 Federal Census.

I thank you for your time and your commitment to this critically important issue for all New Yorkers.

If you have any questions about Suffolk County's public libraries and their ability, and willingness, to support complete count efforts I can be reached at;

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