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April 2, 2024

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Committee on Libraries Chair Carlina Rivera

250 Broadway, Suite 1833

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Re: Budgeting for New York City Libraries

Dear Mayor Adams, Speaker Adams, Majority Leader Farias, Libraries Chair Rivera, Finance Chair Justin Brannan, and New York City Council Members:

I write on behalf of the Authors Guild to encourage you to provide enhanced funding for New York City's libraries in this year's budget. The New York Public Library (NYPL) is facing unprecedented budget cuts that will have devastating impacts on its ability to serve New Yorkers effectively.

The Authors Guild is the nation's oldest and largest professional organization of writers. Since our founding in 1912, we have served as the collective voice of American authors. Our almost 15,000 members include novelists in all genres and categories, nonfiction writers, journalists, historians, and poets. The Guild works to promote the rights and professional interests of authors in various areas, and advocates on issues such as copyright, freedom of expression, and fair compensation.

Public libraries are crucial to developing readers and maintaining a culture of learning. As we march forward in the twenty-first century and the age of AI, access to books and learning that the NYPL provides is even more important. Resident's ability to learn and retrain themselves throughout their adulthood will be key for obtaining and retaining employment.

Moreover, public libraries—the NYPL in particular, located in the heart of the publishing industry—are vital to the development of authors. Many authors learned to love books and decided to pursue writing thanks to their local libraries, and they continue to rely on libraries throughout their careers for research, as a place to write and attend events that foster their growth. This is especially true of writers who come from low income and marginalized communities.

Access to a library and its resources is an equity issue. We are all the richer, as a society, because of this cultural access. The NYPL plays a particularly important role in developing and supporting authors through its many literary events featuring authors' books, as well as through its workshops, including the *Kingsbridge Writing Circle* in the Bronx, the monthly *Write Now! A Writer's Collective* meeting in Manhattan, screenwriting, playwriting and spoken word workshops across the boroughs, along with dozens of creative writing and homework help sessions.

The NYPL also houses the Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers, which grants fellowships to writers that gives them the time, space, and support to pursue their projects with intense focus and dedication. By fostering a vibrant intellectual community, the Center encourages cross-disciplinary exchange and collaboration, enriching the work of its Fellows. The partnership between Fellows and the Library's expert staff leads to new discoveries and enhanced collection development, benefiting both the authors and the library.

The NYPL provides a haven from the attack on books taking place across the country. The number of titles targeted for censorship surged 65 percent in 2023 compared to 2022, reaching the highest levels ever documented by the American Library Association (ALA). Anthony Marx, President of the NYPL, emphasized in his recent testimony before the City Council, further cuts would prevent the library from purchasing books, audiobooks, and eBooks in English and other language, including "copies of popular titles that have been banned at public libraries and schools across the country." Many of these bans disproportionately target books focused on LGBTQ and BIPOC issues, which stifles the voices of some of the most urgent stories.

The NYPL is also responding to this surge in censorship by offering creative writing workshops that are responding to banned books like *Unleashing Our Freedom Stories: A Writing Workshop with Orlando Ferrand* in Washington Heights, the *No Trigger Warnings: A Writing Workshop with Jen Fitzgerald* in Staten Island,

The Authors Guild has long held that a healthy democracy requires vigorous literary debate, diversity of ideas, and a tolerance for discourse that some may find offensive or challenging. Institutions like the NYPL ensure that our democracy remains vibrant by collecting and distributing seminal literary works, films, and translations, and by serving as hubs for knowledge and culture.

Indeed, millions of New Yorkers depend on the NYPL for knowledge, growth, and community, and we cannot allow this cherished institution of our city to fail to live up to its mission. Now more than ever, when books and libraries are under attack across the country—with book censorship surging 65 percent in 2023 as compared to the previous year, and BIPOC and LGBTQ content becoming prey to invidious book bans—we must offer our city’s libraries all the resources they need to fight ignorance, bias, and intolerance.

We call on you to give NYPL’s financial needs due consideration in your budget calculations.

Sincerely,
Mary Rasenberger, CEO
The Authors Guild