

Testimony for the  
District of Columbia Public Library FY2008-2009 Performance Hearing  
March 16, 2009  
To the DC Council Committee on Libraries, Parks, and Recreation  
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Councilmember Thomas, members of the Committee, esteemed guests, and fellow members of the general public; I am here today as a Ward One resident, a library user and volunteer at my neighborhood branch library.

In these tough economic times, Public Libraries are important places to find hope and provide critical support services for residents that are either unemployed, chronically underemployed, or strapped for cash to educate and entertain themselves and their families. Residents of every social class are rediscovering their neighborhood libraries and the great value of library collections and the expertise of library staff. In these times, the library staff has become job counselors, basic skills instructors, and even entertainment advisors.

Due to problems with the 2008 budget and a failed commitment to fix those problems, at the beginning of this month, our libraries have had to close two mornings a week. These cuts were unnecessary and will only increase the stress and strain on already overworked staff. Internet computers that are already busy every hour the library is open will now have longer lines waiting for access. Children's programming is now being crammed into the remaining days of the week. Programs that have always been standing room only will now have to turn people away in order to comply with fire regulations. Libraries are so important for our children because so many of them attend both Public and Charter schools whose libraries lack the critical resources for them to get their projects and papers done for class. Our public libraries are one of the few places for young adults to go and participate in educational activities besides their schools as well. Library hours do not need to remain cut. They should be increased to meet the growing demands for their services.

It now appears that this recession is going to last longer and cut deeper. Cuts in municipal services are inevitable but to take away a critical access point to resources for job hunting, education, and entertainment is simply cruel and self-defeating for a city that needs these services now more than ever before.

Over the last four years, the District of Columbia has seen our public libraries emerge from decades of neglect and begin the process of transforming to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We have seen progress made in the management of library facilities; the stewardship of appropriated funds; the purchase of new library collections; and the provision of consistent access to technology. I fear the reversal of all that progress if you fail to protect the budget for the Public Library in the coming months.

As a District resident, voter, and advocate, I am here today to ask for your vigilance and support to keep our libraries open and fully operational. The year ahead was supposed to be filled with opportunities to celebrate libraries and their value to our community. Eight new or renovated libraries are scheduled to open in 2010 but funding for furniture, signage, and opening day collections may also be inadequate. Millions of dollars have been invested to expand services and provide our communities with truly world-class libraries. But today we face the very real possibility that these facilities will open without adequate staffing and reduced hours.

We always hear from politicians that they "love libraries". Now is your chance to translate that love into the money our libraries need. A closed library serves no one.