

## **Chicago Public Library Commissioner Chris Brown, 2023 Budget Statement – 10/24/22**

Good morning, Madam Chair, Vice Chair Silverstein, and honorable City Council. I'd like to thank you and Mayor Lightfoot for your leadership in making Chicago Public Library a cornerstone of our neighborhoods, integral to the city's commitment to access and equity. For nearly 150 years, CPL has been a trusted resource for people of every age and ability and for speakers of all languages.

Today, CPL has libraries that serve each of the city's 77 neighborhoods, with dedicated staff helping to ensure that our services reflect the vibrant diversity of each individual neighborhood. We are the city's largest provider of free early literacy programming and broadband access, we welcome anyone who walks in our doors, and everything at CPL is free and accessible. We've seen an average of 5,000 visitors per month at each location, even during covid, and have seen approximately 50 million unique engagements with Chicagoans so far this year.

### **Barriers Removed**

We're especially proud of the enormous strides CPL has made towards fulfilling the City's pledge to remove barriers that prevent equitable access to library resources. In recent years, we have eliminated financial barriers by waiving the overdue fees that blocked over 100,000 youths from using the library, we've eased access barriers with the addition of Sunday hours at all locations, and we have tackled geographic barriers by establishing the first West Side regional library in nearly 50 years.

### **Access to Student Supports/Youth Development**

CPL provides critical summertime educational support for youth and youth read over one million more minutes from 2021 to 2022. We also saw a 46% increase of participation in teen activities this summer. We fed thousands of the young people who visited through our partnership with Greater Chicago Food Depository.

During the school year, CPL offers a Homework Help program and interest-based learning for children and teens. We've expanded our nationally recognized YOUmedia program to 29 libraries, with students learning alongside mentors and peers, and discovering their talents. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, library staff reopened neighborhood branches, serving upwards of 300,000 Chicagoans each month.

Just a few weeks ago, we announced a partnership initiative with Chicago Public Schools to support academic success, called *The Club 81*, which simplifies students ability to check out books and connect to more than 70,000 digital resources. This new initiative allows more than 322,000 CPS students and its 21,000 teachers to utilize our materials for in-classroom instruction and learning.

### **Celebration of Diversity**

At a time when book banning is on the rise, I'm prouder than ever to be in a field that values inclusion, access, and empathy. CPL's program and collections embrace diversity. We have materials available in more than 20 languages and offer programs for immigrants in their first language. Our new *Voices for Justice* speaker series, invites Chicagoans to engage in dialogue about social justice with authors, artists, and thought leaders, and we chose : *Maus*, Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer prize-winning graphic novel about the Holocaust and one of the most frequently challenged books, for the 2022 One Book, One Chicago program. To further signal our support for the Freedom to read, in light of national book banning targeting BIPOC and LGBTQIA authors, CPL has launched a campaign to declare public libraries as Book Sanctuaries by increasing access to banned books, developing programs that support the freedom to

read, and installing public art by internationally renowned Chicago artist Theaster Gates.

### **City-wide Collaborations**

Since 2019, Chicago Public Library has been part of Mayor Lightfoot's whole-government approach to provide communities with opportunities and safe spaces. The library has partnered with a wide range of civic entities, including our collaborations with the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) to integrate social and health supports within our locations. CDPH has trained nearly 300 library staff on overdose prevention and, by the close of 2022, all library locations will offer Narcan kits to the public. CPL and CDPH are also working to establish a Mental Health Clinician Liaison position, who will work with CPL to address mental health-related needs of library staff and patrons.

### **Access to Information**

We provide critical access to technology for millions of Chicagoans. We're the city's largest provider of free internet access and public computers. We upgraded our 3,000-plus computers over the past few years, resulting in nearly 700,000 computer sessions and close to 2.4M public Wi-Fi sessions through September of this year. We also strive to make our website as resource-rich as possible and we already have over 30 million visits this year. Thanks to an increased investment in our library collection budget, we made significant investments at 20 libraries on the South and West Sides and have increased spending on books in non-English languages by 20%.

### **Capital Investments**

In order to provide the best programs and services, we need to provide safe, welcoming spaces. As part of the mayor's INVEST South/West initiative, we're working with the communities to design new libraries at North & Pulaski and in the Back of the Yards community. CPL and the Obama Presidential Center continue to collaborate with the Jackson Park community in our journey toward creating the first-ever public library housed in a presidential center. Research shows that these and similar capital projects increase visitation by 20% and performance on standardized test scores.

However, we're aware that, without a dedicated capital budget, we must come up with a plan for continued capital investment, so we have secured seed funding for a capital strategies master plan. In 2023, we'll be working to develop a roadmap that determines our future investments. Through this plan we'll design the libraries of the future and reinvest in our Chicago neighborhoods.

### **Looking Ahead**

Chicago Public Library continues to work hard at democratizing access to information and learning for every citizen of Chicago. Skilled librarians and staff help children build early literacy and learning skills, teens explore new interests and access educational and career opportunities through mentor-led programs, and adults compete in the workforce. This upcoming year, we'll be conducting CPL's first equity assessment to refine our goals and identify access barriers.

In 2023, we turn 150 years young, and we'll be celebrating the stories of Chicago leaders and readers who have shaped CPL, unveiling an anniversary card, and celebrating our birthday in every neighborhood library. I'd like to thank Mayor Lightfoot and the members of the Chicago City Council for their role in making CPL an international and neighborhood leader. Thank you for helping us continue to broaden the perception of what a library can be.