



Friends of the Northeast Library
330 7th St. NE
Washington, DC 20002

DC Council Committee Libraries, Parks, Recreation and Planning
Agency Performance Oversight Hearing for Fiscal Years 2011-2012
Wednesday, February 15, 2012 at 1:00 p.m. Room 412

Hello Chairman Wells and other members of the Library committee. I call it the library committee not to slight parks, swimming pools and tennis courts but simply because I believe they're all secondary to strong libraries. So I think there should be a whole committee dedicated just to libraries. But that's a debate for another day.

My name is Vincent Morris and I am testifying as President of the Friends of the Northeast Library. Our Friends group, like others around the city, exists to help promote and support the library system and to find ways to maximize usage and its appeal to our neighborhood. We do this mainly through selling used books, which allow us to raise money for library activities. For instance, just this month we spent \$100 to buy new earphones for the library. And earlier this week we sponsored a book discussion by Eli Saslow, and donated two copies of his book to local patrons.

If you come by our library on any given day, you can see a cross section of our city. There are homeless, who use the computers to watch videos or listen to music. You can find multi-lingual nanny's caring for toddlers of working parents. You will find retirees who are there for large-print books or to read newspapers. In the afternoon you'd find teenagers and young adults reading graphic novels or doing their homework. You can also see groups of kids from local elementary schools, who come during after-care periods to do arts and crafts projects. And in the evening you can see working professionals tutoring neighborhood kids, or community groups gathering in meeting rooms.

Speaking just for myself, I relish every bit of that daily activity. To me and my family and our neighbors the library is a home away from home. A place to visit on rainy days and sunny days alike. We like the familiarity of the staff, of the interior of the library and of the other neighbors we bump into during our visits.

But there are things we want more of. We want the building cleaner, more consistently so. We want people who aren't as familiar with the NE branch to feel safe and welcome when they come in for the first time. We want the central office staff and our local staff to be energetic and creative and thoughtful about ways to make the library more appealing to the larger neighborhood. We want a range of activities for all ages, but especially for young children. Why? Because the habit of reading starts young. Children who get used to visiting the library when they are 4, 5 and 6 years old will still be visiting it when they are 13, 14 and 15.

As you know, the exterior of the library was renovated two years ago. I've testified several times about my frustration with the way the money for libraries has been allocated across our city. The Georgetown Library gets \$23 million and other branches get completely rebuilt from the ground up, while our branch has a chronically leaking roof, bathrooms that haven't worked in 7 years and delays on contracts.

That said, I am optimistic for the future of our branch, very happy to have Tommy Wells chairing this committee and happy to take your questions.