

**Statement by Neal Gregory, President,
Friends of Southeast Library**

**Agency Performance Oversight Hearing for Fiscal Years 2011-2012
The Committee on Libraries Parks Recreation and Planning,
Council of the District of Columbia**

February 15, 2012

Mr. Chairman, I am here on behalf of the Friends of Southeast Library to advocate for the city's libraries and its extensive system of branches that provide a beacon for residents, young and old, in our neighborhoods.

There are several beautiful new libraries, and there are some older structures such as Southeast Library, the city's second branch, an original Carnegie Library that opened in 1927. Like other older buildings, we need repairs on the heating and air conditioning systems and improved maintenance. But all the city's libraries need longer hours and more books and materials.

Our branch on Capitol Hill is one of the smallest, yet one of the busiest, libraries. The number of patrons and the circulation figures are up five-fold since a remodeling five years ago. When the library is open, it is busy...very busy.

Mr. Chairman, I am sure that you have observed the increasing number of children on Capitol Hill. This population growth is visibly reflected at Southeast Library. The strollers lined up on the sidewalk sometime look like the parking lot of RFK stadium or Nationals Park on game day. In the basement community meeting room, there are story hours four times a week for babies, toddlers and preschoolers up to age 5. On average there are 40 youngsters attending each session. But the library is closed two mornings a week. Story time could easily expand to Tuesday and Thursday mornings if the library were open and staff were available. There is a session called "Booliwah," where families with babies come twice a month to learn baby sign language and songs. The Friends' group funds this program, which averages 22 families per session. On Saturday mornings there are STAR workshops where the children's librarian trains new mothers in the Sing, Talk and Read method of early literacy. Friends of Southeast Library provides refreshments for these programs and has purchased puppets and other supplies to support these efforts.

Upstairs at Southeast is busy as well. On almost any given day, there are waiting lines to use one of the 22 computers. People are searching employment sites, polishing their job resumes, writing college applications, doing homework, checking out books, seeking help from the library staff. At various times, one can find knitting clubs, discussion groups and book clubs. People bring their laptops, and in the spring and summer, many activities extend to the magnificent garden that was built by the local Girl Scout troop with support from the Friends. And it's great to see teens coming to the library after school and for teen night programs on the evenings when the library is open. DCPL's Teens of Distinction program has achieved national recognition, but it clearly needs to be expanded to inspire more young people to greater achievements.

The budgeting for the D.C. Public Library defies logic. As more people use the library, fewer resources are available. Between 2008 and 2012, new libraries have been built—a 30 percent increase in space—and circulation has increased by 36 percent. Yet staffs have been reduced, funds for security and maintenance have been cut, the book budget is down by more than 56 percent, and the hours the libraries are open have been reduced. Sunday afternoons used to be the busiest day at Southeast Library, and, as I noted earlier, two more days of morning hours are really needed.

Libraries are information centers and community centers, bringing neighborhoods together. There is a lot invested in buildings and real estate, but the libraries need to be open and inviting, with trained personnel to provide the latest materials and technology to the public. I urge this committee to shore up this major asset with adequate funding to accomplish this.

Thank you.