

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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*****PRESS RELEASE*****

**QUEENS PUBLIC LIBRARY AND QUEENS DEFENDERS FORM PARTNERSHIP TO EQUIP
PAROLEES RELEASED FROM PRISON DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC WITH
SMARTPHONES, DATA PLANS AND OTHER TECH RESOURCES**

Funded Through a \$330,000 Federal CARES Act Grant for Museums and Libraries, the “Immediate Access: Technology Re-entry Program” Will Assist 75 Individuals Over Two Years

QUEENS, NY_ Queens Public Library and Queens Defenders have formed a partnership to offer a tech-focused program to help parolees overcome the challenges they face following their release from correctional facilities during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Re-entry of former inmates - who had no access to technology while incarcerated - is challenging, especially for those who have been imprisoned for decades. The COVID-19 pandemic has added new barriers to this already difficult transition.

As part of the “Immediate Access: Technology Re-entry Program,” the parolees recently released from prison will receive smartphones to connect them to online resources and services to assist them with re-entry, ranging from the Library's virtual programming and financial and transportation apps to online certification programs. They will also receive a data plan, technology assistance, and job training to equip them with the information, skills, and resources they need to help them move forward on the outside.

All participants will have access to QPL-created resources, including its Re-entry Resource Guide, and assistance from the Library's Job and Business Academy and its Queensbridge Tech Lab at the Queensbridge housing complex in Long Island City. In addition, QPL staff will design a skills training and job certification curriculum for each individual.

The program, which will assist the 75 formerly incarcerated individuals over a two-year period, is funded with more than \$330,000 from [the CARES Act Grants for Museums and Libraries, awarded to QPL and](#)

[QD by the Institute of Museum and Library Service \(IMLS\)](#). QPL and QD are among the 68 grant recipients selected from more than 1,700 applicants.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has made the transition from life inside a correctional facility to life on the outside especially challenging,” said **QPL President and CEO Dennis M. Walcott**. “Our joint program with Queens Defenders will provide formerly incarcerated individuals with tools allowing them to take advantage of learning opportunities available at the Library and beyond, helping them connect with their communities and realize their full potential. We are grateful to Queens Defenders for partnering with us to develop this important initiative and to the Institute of Museum and Library Services for awarding us this grant.”

“Queens Defenders is honored to partner with the Queens Public Library on this grant award from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to address the needs of individuals moving out of incarceration and into the community – a transition made even more challenging by the COVID-19 pandemic,” said **Queens Defenders Executive Director and Founder Lori Zeno**. “This technology-focused initiative will help individuals re-establish themselves in the community as they aspire to lead productive lives free of further justice-system involvement. We look forward to sharing lessons learned so more individuals re-entering society from incarceration can benefit from the supports and access to technology offered through this program.”

Queens Public Library has worked with Queens Defenders on a number of prior initiatives, including the Youth Justice Court, which empowers youths while they help their peers from the community avoid school suspension, criminal and family court appearances, and potential violations of probation. The program, offered at four QPL locations - Cambria Heights, Laurelton, Central and the Queens Public Library for Teens in Far Rockaway – has resumed virtually in November.

QPL has a dedicated, trained team of staff members who assist formerly justice-involved individuals as they transition back into society, helping them obtain a library card, teaching them job skills and directing to job search resources, technology workshops and literacy programs.

About Queens Public Library

Queens Public Library is one of the largest and busiest public library systems in the United States, dedicated to serving the most ethnically and culturally diverse area in the country. An independent, non-profit organization founded in 1896, Queens Public Library offers free access to a collection of more than 5 million books and other materials in multiple languages, technology and digital resources, and more than 87,500 educational, cultural, and civic programs a year. It consists of 66 locations, including branch libraries, a Central Library, seven adult learning centers, a technology lab, one universal pre-kindergartens, and two teen centers.

About Queens Defenders

Queens Defenders (formerly Queens Law Associates) provides free, high-quality legal representation to individuals living in Queens County. Since 1996, Queens Defenders’ highly skilled attorneys have represented over 450,000 Queens residents and handle major trials and homicides, work with clients involved in Queens treatment courts, and represent cases involving domestic violence, youth charged with felonies, and immigrants facing criminal charges. In 2013, the organization launched youth diversion programs to help young people develop critical life skills, improve emotional and physical health, and enhance educational and professional opportunities to build successful lives. Learn more at queensdefenders.org.