



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Hartford Public Library Distributes Free Books April 29**

**HARTFORD** – Hartford Public Library and the Hartford Public Schools continue to take tangible steps to help children’s literacy in low-income neighborhoods across Hartford. No virus can stop that effort.

Through its partnership with First Book, a nonprofit organization committed to distributing free books in low-income areas, HPL purchased over 2,000 books and gave them out at several of the Hartford Public Schools’ food distribution sites on Wednesday, April 29.

With the library closed, HPL Children’s Librarian Denise Martens’ home became the staging area for the packing of all those books. Once packed, Martens and the other children’s librarians picked the books up and brought them around the city. “We were really able to get quality books, diverse books – books kids want to read,” she said.

Hartford has many of what have been described as “book deserts” – areas where books are rare in the home and access to purchasing them is extremely limited.

A 2001 study noted that on average in a middle class community one child had access to 13 books. In poverty ridden neighborhoods similar to those found in Hartford, there was a single book for every 300 children. When the study was repeated in 2014, the results in low-income neighborhoods were even worse, with a single book being available for over 800 children, according to a 2016 article in The Atlantic.

Children make the majority of their neurological connections through the age of three. Without a rich vocabulary that can only be augmented through engagement with print, children from low-income families will face another disadvantage.

“There are all kinds of studies that show that kids who have access to books have better outcomes in school,” Martens said. “Our hope is to put books in the homes, giving kids the opportunity to be in more interactive-rich environments.”

This book distribution is part of an ongoing effort. First Books gave HPL a grant for \$40,000 in the Fall of 2019 to be used for the purchase of new books. The library then partnered with nine Hartford schools located in low-income neighborhoods.

Approximately 24,000 new books were given to Hartford schoolchildren over the course of this school year. The books were chosen by both students, looking for what they might like, and teachers trying to match the texts to a child's literacy level.

"My hope is that the project will get bigger. This is something that we will continue to pursue," Martens said.

**About Hartford Public Library**

Now celebrating its 126th year, Hartford Public Library remains at the forefront of redefining the urban library experience in the 21st Century. With seven locations throughout the city, the library provides education, intellectual enrichment and cultural development for thousands of children, youth and adults every year. Hartford Public Library has also gained local and national recognition for its wide range of new initiatives and partnerships designed to meet the needs of a diverse and dynamic city and region, including immigration services, employment assistance and youth leadership training. [www.hplct.org](http://www.hplct.org).