

Press Release from www.savethelibrary.org and the Librarians' Guild
March 4, 2010

LOS ANGELES PUBLIC LIBRARY FACES DEVASTATING CUTS

As Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa calls for layoffs of thousands of city employees to help close a \$212-million deficit in the city's budget, the cuts faced by the Los Angeles Public Library are among the most severe, despite a 10% increase in library use during the 2008-2009 fiscal year.

Over 17 million people visited Central Library and the 72 branches of the Los Angeles Public Library in 2008-2009, and checked out over 18 million items.

The current "layoff list" produced by City Administrative Officer Miguel Santana, and approved by Villaraigosa and the City Council eliminates 11% of library staff. On average, city departments will cut less than 7% of their staff, with cuts to many departments set at less than 3%. Since then, Villaraigosa and City Council have voted to eliminate 3000 more positions in city departments by July 1, 2010.

The cuts will be devastating to library service, requiring LAPL to cut staff, buy fewer materials, offer fewer programs, and stay open fewer hours. The service hours now being provided by libraries are threatened by staffing limitations, and additional cuts will limit service even further.

"People use the library computers for job applications, school applications, they use test books to study for the GRE and SAT, they do research for school projects," said Kian Daizadeh, Acting Senior Librarian at the John Muir branch library in South Los Angeles. "When we're not open, people pound on the door."

In response to these proposed cuts, the Librarians' Guild AFSCME Local 2626, the union that represents librarians working for the City of Los Angeles, has launched Save the Library, a campaign to prevent the Mayor's and City Council's budget cuts from gutting library services to Los Angeles residents.

"The proposed cuts are so drastic that library services will be almost non-existent within the next five years," said Roy Stone, President of the Librarians' Guild. "This is not a 'scare tactic.' The Mayor and City Council

are proceeding with a budget cut that devastates the funding for library services to every community."

The Library has not hired new staff since 2008, and is already operating with 22% less staff than in 2009. The Library lost 145 staff to the early retirement program approved by Villaraigosa and City Council in October 2009, in addition to 110 vacant positions that cannot be filled due to the City's hiring freeze.

The proposed cuts to the Library especially threaten programs for children, teenagers, and families, which are at the core of the Library's service mission.

When Karla Gonzalez began working at the Benjamin Franklin branch library a year ago, they had been without a children's librarian for several years. "We are in the process of re-establishing programs for children who have been without them. About 300-400 children participated in the summer reading program at the Benjamin Franklin library during my first year. If we can't offer this next summer, it will be a devastating loss, especially since so many children do not have access to libraries at their schools."

Candice Mack, a young adult librarian at the Encino-Tarzana branch, had over 60 teenagers volunteer at her library this summer. "It was exhausting but exhilarating to see the city's young people giving back to their community by helping the library."

Why are teenagers so dedicated to their libraries? Mack explains, "The library is a safe place. It's a place where they can relax, and get away from whatever pressures they're facing at school, at home, or with their peers. It's also one of the last places where, if they want to meet to work on school projects, it's free. They don't have to buy anything to be there. And we have the resources, the books, the computers, and it's all free."

In addition to programs for children, the Library's programming, services, and resources for job-seekers, business-people, researchers, writers, and students are also threatened by the cuts.

Echo Park resident Kyra Norsigian uses her neighborhood library branches to take writing classes, attend lectures, participate in family game nights, and recently took the qualifying exam for a job collecting the 2010 U.S. Census at her local library. Norsigian said, "When I first moved out to LA, my local branch was the first place I looked for free events where I knew I

could meet new people and do things I enjoy. Cutting staff and hours at the LAPL will not only negatively affect me personally, but will also deny services to so many people in my neighborhood who depend on the branches as a source of information and community."

The Librarians' Guild have launched a website, petition drive, and online letter-writing campaign urging Los Angeles residents to contact the Mayor and City Council in support of the Los Angeles Public Library. Guild members are also circulating information to library supporters on Facebook and Twitter.

Save the Library: <http://www.savethelibrary.org>

Save the Los Angeles Public Library on Facebook:

<http://tinyurl.com/ykocryo>

Save the Library on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/SaveTheLibrary>

For more information, please contact:

"Save the Library"

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