May 21, 2020

From the CLA President

As economies are suffering, so are libraries. It isn’t just public libraries that are directly funded by cities, counties, and other government agencies. Our public law libraries, our school libraries, our university libraries all are significantly hurting with our traumatic change in the economy.

Libraries can also be easy targets. How many times have you heard “Why do we need libraries when everything is on the internet.” We know this isn’t true, and finding the best information for each need requires skill and expertise. What is often on the internet required an expert to get it there, and ongoing maintenance to make it available.

We know how many also need help – the connectivity, the device, the assistance to find the source, craft the search, fill out the form, and accomplish the goal. This crisis has shown so clearly that the digital divide is real, and libraries are the bridge.

EveryLibrary, a 501c4 non-profit that supports libraries, posted a piece earlier in April titled “We Will Lose Libraries to COVID-19” https://www.libraries2020.org/we_will_lose_libraries_to_covid_19 and on LinkedIn comments came in that this wouldn’t happen. Yet budgets are being slashed, and it is happening. One public library has an 80% budget cut. Another threatened with complete elimination. Staff freezes, furloughs, and layoffs are happening, along with devastating elimination of books, databases, and programs. It isn’t until we can open our doors to the public again that we will really see how many hours will be cut, and how many branches will be closed.

Using CARES Act funding, the California State Library has provided an online Summer Reading Program platform for all public libraries, and that plus donations from Friends of Libraries and Library Foundations and other supporters may be what carries Summer Reading Programs to students facing a severe “Corona slide” of missed educational goals and disrupted learning. In every household, access to books matters and for those without staff or supplies to adapt services and buildings for delivery it is only those who will be able to buy who will be able to have books. CLA is proud to be a partner in this newly provided service and in making summer learning matter for all children https://calchallenge.org/

The May revision of the Governor’s proposed budget eliminated both Lunch at the Library and ZipBooks. With over 280,000 meals served to children, and ZipBooks serving as the only way libraries could get materials to the public in many jurisdictions for the last two months, these programs are being cut right when we need them the most. Your CLA Legislative and Advocacy Committee, working with our longtime lobbyists, has crafted a powerful message to key Budget Committee legislators, and as I write our advocates are making those important calls to save these programs, so they can continue to serve communities through their public libraries.
The groups that support us, our Friends and Foundations, are not immune. Book sales are being cancelled, and major fundraisers delayed. Those who give to causes they love are seeing all the causes in need at once, and when families are hungry, massive numbers of jobs are lost, and so many need mental health assistance, there is no shortage of worthy places in need of every dollar they can get. We cannot count on personal philanthropy alone to carry us through these times.

As we all face an uncertain future, serving our communities that face the same, I am going to close with two asks of you. First, reach out to your local elected officials and speak to them about the library. The piece from EveryLibrary offers many suggestions, as does CLA’s Day in the District page https://www.cla-net.org/page/737. Way too many think that if our doors are closed we aren’t at work. Tell them what we are doing today, how we are planning for tomorrow, and what we look forward to offering soon.

Second, renew your membership in CLA https://www.cla-net.org/general/register_member_type.asp? (Contact info@cla-net.org if you need help resetting your password) Your Association is hard at work for libraries, and planning for more partnerships and support to you in these times. Every time we can speak for our members, we ensure we are heard. Every time we can get the word out through Committees and contacts, your advocates step up. Please continue to support them with your membership.

Thank you Libraries, for all you do for your communities!