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Now more than ever, the Oregon Library Association (OLA) asserts the importance and value of retaining and supporting library workers to maintain public library services which support employment, education, and entrepreneurship. During the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic downturn, it is crucial to continue these important services for residents across the state of Oregon.

From computer appointments and curbside service to home delivery and virtual reading programs, over the past five months public libraries across the state have pivoted quickly and creatively to ensure critical services are available during these difficult times. Libraries have shifted to online resources and become a critical resource for factual, vetted, and reliable information when it is most needed. Because library workers are at the center of library service, layoffs due to budgetary concerns will have the unintended consequence of reduced services and a negative impact on libraries and librarianship in the long term when their services are needed most acutely. It is for this reason that we urge library management to retain all library workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

OLA acknowledges library leaders are faced with difficult decisions in the wake of economic downturn and seemingly insurmountable challenges due to the pandemic and restricted facilities for service. Physical distancing and restricted spaces limit librarian work shifts and service capacity. These new regulations may require managers to update and/or change existing job descriptions and policies. Nonetheless, library workers and leaders have found creative, safe ways to continue serving the public.

OLA also recognizes that not all public libraries and library systems are governed in the same way and must adhere to policymakers such as commissioners, councilors, and trustees. We urge managers and employees alike to work together with their respective unions to navigate these challenges and develop acceptable compromises. While not all library workers benefit from union support, we recommend those who do seek council from their union representatives.

The educational and social impact of public library services is well known for its economic benefit. With equitable access for all community members, libraries have a positive ripple effect that directly impacts the economic success of both urban and rural communities. Some of these services include early literacy support, workforce development, supplemental education for adults, and services to new and marginalized populations. Libraries are essential, not only during prosperous times, but more so during economic crises.

OLA and its membership stand in solidarity with library workers during these challenging times and urge policymakers and elected officials to retain all library staff by pivoting and shifting services to fill the important need for access to information and economic opportunity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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