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PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD ASKS LEGISLATURE TO MOVE FORWARD WITH RESTORATION OF FUNDING

Sharon A. Thomas, chair, of the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library System released the following announcement today during a media event at the downtown Central Public Library in Lafayette Square.

As you know this has been a challenging time for our library system. On behalf of the board, I want to publicly acknowledge and thank the strong community of library supporters. Throughout this budget process, you have let it be known that our libraries not only add to the quality of life here, but also to the educational, economic and social value of our great region.

Earlier this week, by invitation, Library Administrators and trustees attended the Erie County Legislature's Cultural Enrichment committee meeting. The end result of the meeting was that there was no clear indication or confirmation as to if, and then when, our libraries will receive restored funding.

Based on the outcome of that meeting, last night I sent a letter to the Honorable Barbara Miller-Williams, Chairwoman of the Erie County Legislature.

In summary, the letter was a plea from the library to act now and agree on library funding for 2011. We are calling on the elected body to work together to provide funding to the Library System as soon as possible.

The Library Board is prepared to limit the reduction of hours to member libraries and branches as of January 1, 2011 based on an additional allocation of funds from the County.

While steep increases in costs and reductions in funding will still necessitate cutbacks in services and staff, additional funding from the County will mitigate the effects of these funding challenges for one year and enable libraries to remain open each week to at least meet state minimum standards.

It is important to point out that the Library System Board clearly understands the severity of the County's economic situation and has approved the expenditure of \$2.6 million from our undesignated fund balance to cover transition and support costs associated with these changes. That means that we are using our rainy day fund as well.

- ❑ Loyal patrons, many of whom rely on libraries for employment, health and welfare references and resources, are unclear about the future of library services.
- ❑ And towns and villages remain unsure of their own libraries open hours beginning in less than 2 weeks, on January 1.
- ❑ People's lives are on hold - their jobs in question.

Without confirmation of the funding as soon as possible, the System will be forced to implement the drastic and austere plan approved by the Library's Board of Trustees. This translates to having some libraries only open 16 hours per week.

In my letter, I requested that the Chairwoman finalize the 2011 funding plan for the Library System now so we can move forward with delivering library services to the deserving county residents who rely, expect and value our libraries.

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