



County of Fairfax, Virginia

To protect and enrich the quality of life for the people, neighborhoods and diverse communities of Fairfax County

April 8, 2020

Dear Members of the Coalition to Expand Library Access,

I write to you with gratitude and resolve during a difficult time. Despite the difficulties and disruption that Covid-19 has brought to Fairfax County, we have all benefited from the professionalism and dedication of the employees of Fairfax County. Our libraries, in particular, remain a bright point that the public can rely on even when the doors are closed. Library staff have initiated online programming, continued with chat services to respond to patron inquiries, increased the supply of digital materials and created new pathways for children to find educational tools online. Years of work to make the library digitally accessible are paying dividends today. Library staff are also helping out other agencies during this time—and have even put the Library's 3D printers to work manufacturing face shield parts for the County Department of Health.

So it is in this can-do spirit of our Library staff that I tell you the Library Board of Trustees is committed to making our Libraries as accessible to the public as possible. But the time for expanded hours must wait until we successfully emerge from the health and economic issues that is resulting from the virus. We must put our It's About Time campaign on hold.

Last night County Executive Bryan Hill released his revised FY21 advertised budget. As anticipated, it is much diminished from what we saw in the original advertised budget which came out just a short six weeks ago on February 27. I encourage you to review the full budget document, as all of the information in the document but for the sake of bringing everyone up to speed quickly, below are the key points regarding our Library.

The Library's requested funds for expanded and consistent hours have been removed from the budget. Additionally, the new behavioral health worker position has been removed. At this time, it is not clear if the library will be allowed to move forward with elimination of fines on children's materials.

Library facilities remain on the Capital Improvement Plan for a fall 2020 referendum, however the County reserves the right to review and modify depending on the economic recovery.

I know this may sound like a lot of bad news but there are some silver linings. Although our "new" funding has been removed, there have been no cuts to base level services or programs of the library. At this time, no staffing decreases in any agencies are being recommended. Also, the County Executive recognized the importance of the expanded hours effort when he wrote: "Additionally the expansion of County library hours has been deferred, and I know that this change will be a disappointment for many in our community." We know the Supervisors are also disappointed that the funding needed to be cut and I am confident we can count on their support when the time is right.

I look forward to the time when we are able to restart our work as the public's need for expanded and consistent hours remains. For now, we will support our staff and libraries as they work through this difficult time.

Best to you and your families,
Miriam Smolen
Chair, Fairfax County Library Board of Trustees