

As we all face budget cuts, staff reductions and hardships, we need to provide accurate information to our legislative body and library community on the needs of our membership. In this vein of providing critical information, I am forwarding a message from our State Librarian Rebecca Hamilton. We are asking you all to please share this information with your friends, family and co-workers. It is vital that we provide the facts to our constituents on this issue. If you have a moment, please read the following message and consider the facts, the impact on your lives and the impact on the state of Louisiana's libraries. And when asked by your community to respond to the needs of this organization, please do so with the facts made available to you.

Thank you for your continued support of the membership of the Louisiana Library Association.

Melissa Hymel

President

LLA

Rebecca Hamilton wrote:

The State Library's position in a nutshell:

The two areas in which the State Library is facing major cuts for the FY09-10 funding year are in staffing and state aid. Both are critical to the continued successful delivering of public library services across the state.

The proposed cuts to the State Library budget are:

- 1. Loss of 7 staff positions, over half of which are high-level professional positions.**
- 2. A decrease of 73% in state aid to public libraries from \$3,000,000 to a mere \$800,000. This does not even provide the base grant to each parish; much less provide per-capita funding.**

The thing to remember is that after the storms of 2005 the State Library embarked on a complete reorganization and updating of existing positions and services. At that time, the organization was streamlined and made more efficient. This is the same thing the Governor is doing now with all of state government; however the State Library has already done this. The loss of the 7 additional positions will cut into the core of what we do for the public libraries and our citizens. We downsized the State Library in FY 05-06 and have no more downsizing to do.

Some Library Facts:

Louisiana Public Libraries:

- FedEx/Kinko's in downtown Baton Rouge charges \$0.20/minute or \$12 per hour for computer use. Our 6,500,000 Louisiana library users saved almost \$79,000,000 in 2008 by using the public libraries in Louisiana.
- Louisiana libraries employ 2,939 people.
- 85,000 children hone their reading skills each summer by participating in the Summer Reading Program
- Almost half a million books have been loaned among Louisiana public libraries since 2002; these are materials not available in their local libraries.
- 20,000 school children voted for their favorite book in the 2008 Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Program
- Libraries are centers for communication, information and normalcy in the aftermath of natural disasters and during times of economic crisis.
- Almost 3,000,000 searches will be performed this year in vetted, high-quality informational and educational databases provided by the State Library in cooperation with local public libraries.
- 14,500,000 visitors enter Louisiana public libraries annually.
- Libraries provide support for small businesses and economic development.

The State Library:

- 21,000 readers and non-readers enjoyed the 6th annual Louisiana Book Festival.
- Provides educational and informational databases for all Louisiana citizens.
- Manages an interlibrary loan system for all 68 public library systems which allows them to obtain materials for their citizens that local budgets cannot afford.
- Provides a van delivery service among all public libraries and university libraries to transport interlibrary loan materials.
- Provides for the information needs of Louisiana state agencies and employees.

- Gathers and disseminates government information to citizens through the depository system.
- Actively solicits, purchases, preserves and makes accessible the history and culture of Louisiana for current and future generations.
- Opened its doors after Gustav while the rest of state government was without power and offered free Internet access to citizens and other government agencies.
- Provides an active and critically-needed program of staff development and training for public library staff.
- Obtained a \$155,000 federal grant to provide leadership training to the next generation of Louisiana library leaders.
- Houses the library for the blind and physically handicapped, loaning almost 185,000 talking books directly to those that cannot read standard print.

Projected FY09-10 Budget Cuts Will:

- Leave 7 critical SLOL professional and clerical positions unfunded, resulting in existing staff taking on even more duties and resulting in long wait lines and deterioration in customer service.
- Decrease in State Aid to Libraries program from \$3 million to \$800,000, representing a 73% cut. This money is spent by the public libraries to keep their collections and technology relevant.
- Cuts deeply effect the budgets of local public libraries, preventing them from upgrading software and hardware as needed, upgrading their Internet bandwidth and buying the books and other materials their communities need.
- Cuts have weakened the ability of SLOL to meet the needs of the public libraries, and by extension, all Louisianans.

State Aid Talking Points for Public Libraries to Use with Legislators

- The _____ Parish Library uses State Aid funding to _____ (for example: buy computers, servers, scanners, printers; install wireless; enhance our collections; buy materials for special needs patrons; license online databases; keep our software current and up-to-date, upgrade technology, pay for Internet, upgrade bandwidth, subscribe to after-school online tutoring for every child in the parish—these were taken straight from state aid final reports)
- Without State Aid, the _____ Parish Library would _____ (for example: fall further behind in technology, be unable to replace/add computers for the public, not be able to hire local computers maintenance people to keep our computers running and virus-free, not be able to upgrade our Internet connection, not be able to buy the CDs, DVDs and Playaways that our users want, be unable to obtain reliable technical support, not be able to buy foreign language materials so that we can reach out to new communities—again, taken from state aid final reports)
- Because of State Aid, the _____ Parish Library can _____ (for example, redirect our local funding into maintaining the status quo in our operating budget in a time of overall price increases; pay for online tutoring, enhanced children’s programs, adult programs, strategic planning)
- State Aid is an excellent example of Return on Investment. Government offices that are closing and eliminating print information are now providing that information via the Internet and steering people to their local libraries to fill out government forms and get their information.
- Louisiana is well below the national average in number of homes with computers and Internet access. 2003 census data showed that nearly 54% of Louisiana households did not have a home computer. It is these very people that need libraries and the resources they provide, the most.
- State Aid frees up local dollars to be spent on extra staffing which will be critical during a time of economic hardship. More people will turn to their local public libraries for resources and online help and we may be forced to serve more people with less staff as our resources are stretched.

Buzzwords and phrases to use:

- Provides technology for equity of access
- Bridges the digital divide

- Helps balance traditional library materials with technology needs
- Gives rural areas access to information
- Great return on investment for taxpayer dollars
- Is the single best way to get books and a love of reading into the hands of our children.
- State aid pays for Internet connectivity at branch libraries, which have now become the *de facto* e-government satellite offices.

Memorable quotes from State Aid Reports:

“State Aid funding makes it possible for our library to continue to maintain the level of spending necessary to acquire traditional library resources, while at the same time providing our patrons with current technology required to access information via the Internet and other electronic resources. State Aid funding is vital to our mission of providing excellence in library services and resources to all citizens of _____ Parish on an equal basis.”

“The State Aid funds are very vital and noteworthy to the _____ Parish Library. Rural areas desire the same technological opportunities that urban areas have available. These services are very costly to supply. The State Aid funds make it possible for us to provide state-of-the-art technology to our patrons.”

“State Aid funds were also used to replace outdated PCs at the [number of] branches in our library system. Replacing older PCs is essential to being able to provide services using up-to-date software and being able to participate effectively in the online world.

“Our State Aid was particularly helpful this year in offsetting expenses for library collections and technology as our budget continues to be challenged by the increasing cost of operating expenses. We greatly appreciate the continued support of library services in Louisiana.”

“The _____ Parish Library system is again thankful for the hard work of the staff of the State Library and the legislators who made this funding possible. With continued State Aid to Libraries, better service will be forthcoming so that our Mission statement, “To serve all the people of the parish, encompassing individuals and groups of every age...is the broad purpose of the _____ Parish Library,” might be realized.

Talking Points for Reinstating State Library Positions

General Points:

- The work of the State Library does not decrease with fewer staff; existing staff will need to take on additional duties as has been the case since 2005. Staff burnout is a real concern. Additionally, the State Library has vowed to maintain the level of service we are accustomed to which is impossible to do with reduced resources. Because the State Library is already understaffed, this means the remaining staff will not be able to answer our questions as quickly, spend as much time planning and conducting workshops for our trustees and staff nor assisting us with various projects that we undertake.
- All staff at the State Library are available to us for consultations, training, ideas and assistance. In many cases, they are like an extension of our own public library staff. Cutting State Library staff will be like cutting our own staff because our staff will have to take on additional work and will have no where to turn for assistance.

Specific Positions:

- Head of Technical Services – This position has been vacant for quite some time and the result is that the public libraries’ databases are not meeting national standards. The State Library has not been able to provide the training and guidance needed to build an effective statewide database of public library materials. Also, as more and more information, especially state publications, are being published electronically, we need the guidance and direction from this position in order to learn to manage electronic materials.
- Head of Reference – The State Library staff act as a backup for our own reference departments, answering questions that our staff does not have the resources or expertise to answer. Without the

assistance of the State Library reference staff, the citizens of _____ will not have access to the latest in-depth research when they need it most. In addition, this position oversees the selection of materials for the State Library's collection. We rely heavily on the State Library's collection to supplement our own collections; we can never buy everything our community wants and needs. Without this position, it is very possible the State Library will be unable to have the books we need on the shelves when we need them.

- Library Consultant – Library Consultants work directly with me and my staff. We can call on them at any time to compile information for us, to advise us on how to proceed in legal and personnel matters, to provide training for our staff and trustees, etc. As loss of any positions in this area will result in longer waits to get the information and assistance we need.
- Center for the Book Assistant – The Book Festival has grown from an initial attendance in 2002 of around 6000 participants to almost 21,000 in 2008. The State Library had planned to work with us to host regional programs and events. This will not happen without the State Library having the staff to do the programming. In addition, we need help applying for grants and doing fundraising. As the economic picture worsens, funders become scarcer and existing funders are reducing their support. Existing State Library staff will not have the time to help us do fundraising without the additional assistance.
- Support Positions -- Staff at the State Library use two computer systems to search for and borrow requested materials for the public libraries. The interlibrary loan staff supports a statewide computer system that handles over 100,000 requests per year. The Circulation staff checks out and re-shelves all library materials. All of these positions work directly with and for the public libraries and with the general public to make library materials accessible and usable.

Even if these positions do not exist, the work will still need to be done. This means that other staff, often professional level staff, will need to assume additional duties which will degrade customer service and will mean that higher-level duties such as in-depth research and collection development will be curtailed, which will affect us.

Rebecca Hamilton
State Librarian