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The Perfect Storm of Budget Cuts Take Libraries Back 50 Years

LANSING, Mich. – The Michigan Library Association board of directors today expressed concern with Governor Rick Snyder’s proposed 2011-2012 Fiscal Year Budget announced last week. The Governor’s budget proposes cutting 40 percent of state aid to libraries, meaning all libraries are in jeopardy of losing statewide library services.

“This is coupled with the fact that we are facing a perfect storm of funding cuts - every source of funding available to libraries— state aid, renaissance zone reimbursements, tax capture of dedicated library millages, elimination of personal property taxes and Federal funds – is being chopped-off at the knees. There isn’t much more we can take and be expected to survive,” said Christine Berro, Michigan Library Association Board President.

In his State of the State address, Gov. Snyder spoke about the importance of growing Michigan’s knowledge-based economy and the power of group purchasing, two initiatives supported by most in Michigan. The cuts to library funding proposed in the 2011-2012 budget move the library community in the exact opposite direction.

“Libraries are critical to moving Michigan toward a knowledge-based economy. Libraries are partners in programs such as economic gardening with tools for small businesses such as online market research information and literacy programs for everyone from pre-kindergarten to senior citizens. Every one of these programs is at-risk for elimination at the proposed budget levels,” Berro said. “The library community is hemorrhaging money from every angle. Every library in every community will feel the impact of these cuts.”

Libraries are the only community that has successfully achieved statewide group purchasing which the Governor has called for – saving the state \$72 million - and that is now at risk. The MeLibrary, MeLCat interlibrary loan and MeL Tests and Tutorials – all resources used for research, education, job seeking and preparation – are in jeopardy. These services are invaluable to students at all levels and across the education spectrum.

“We greatly appreciate Gov. Snyder including funding for the Michigan eLibrary as its own line item in the budget, but unfortunately it’s just not enough to maintain the service at its current level and the entire system is at risk of collapsing.”

Gov. Snyder also is calling for utilizing online tools for state services, to save state funds and create efficiencies. This is a trend seen across the nation, at both the state and federal level. As state and federal programs require users to access information and complete the registrations on the Internet such as unemployment, disability and taxes, libraries become even more crucial.

“Government officials are requiring people to use the Internet to complete essential services and when Internet access isn’t available at home, they are sent to their library; but the state is passing the funding burden onto the locals,” states Berro. “The proposed funding level also means regional library systems – also known as library cooperatives or co-ops – will cease to exist. Within two years, the impact will be widely visible. Patrons will not be able to check-out books at some libraries, 11 library co-ops will close, GED test preparation services will be eliminated and additional individual libraries will close.”

MLA is Michigan's oldest and largest library association spanning three centuries. Guided by the belief that access to information, technology, the internet, and government is the cornerstone of a free society, the Michigan Library Association has advocated for libraries on behalf of the state's residents for more than 100 years. MLA supports education and new literacies, collaboration and resource sharing, intellectual freedom and citizen access to publicly funded research. For more information on MLA, please visit www.mla.lib.mi.us.

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