

STATE BUDGET UPDATE Monday June 29, 2009

On Friday afternoon, responding to the worsening economy, Governor Rendell revised his budget plan for 2009-10 by delivering on his promise to cut an additional half-billion dollars from the proposal he offered back in February. For library users, if this plan becomes law—or a plan that's even worse—Pennsylvanians can expect library closings, reduced books, DVDs and Internet access, and fewer trained professionals to assist them.

Here's how Governor Rendell's new plan offered today would impact library services:

1. The Public Library Subsidy will be reduced by \$9,250,000 (12.2% less than this year.) Since this appropriation is the one that goes to local libraries for operations, cutting the subsidy from \$75 million to \$66 million will inevitably lead to cutbacks in hours open, resources available, and personnel.
2. Two other line items called Library Access and Electronic Library Catalog will be merged and cut by \$3,308,000 (29.8% less than this year.) These two appropriations fund POWER Library, the statewide library card, interlibrary delivery, the Ask Here PA 24/7 reference service, and the ACCESS PA database. The newly merged line item drops from a combined total this year of \$11 million to \$7.7 million next year. We do not yet know which of the programs currently funded by these dollars might not be funded next year if the combined funding is less.
3. Library Services for the Visually Impaired and Disabled was unchanged from the Governor's February plan which trimmed the \$2.9 million appropriation by 1.7%. But it should be noted that this appropriation has had no meaningful increase since the last century. Meanwhile, new costly technology was mandated and demand for services rises due to Pennsylvania's aging population and the growing number of wounded war veterans returning home needing specialized library services.
4. Funding for the Office of Commonwealth Libraries (which includes the State Library) was not changed today, so the devastating 50% cut proposed back in February remains in the Governor's plan. What is an inadequate \$4.8 million appropriation this year will drop to \$2.4 million next year under this plan, an outcome that contributes heavily to the next, final point.
5. Pennsylvania will lose an estimated \$1.9 million in federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funds if cuts proposed in items 2, 3, and 4 above, take place. LSTA funds pay for shared programs and resources, and serve as incentives for local library projects. These dollars will go to other states at the very time Pennsylvania strives to get every nickel possible out of Washington.

Just go to the Pennsylvania Library Association website, www.palibraries.org and click on "Budget Proposals Compared."

Nearly everyone in Harrisburg agrees that the revenue shortfall going in to next year is about \$3.2 billion. In a nutshell, the debate boils down to this: Can next year's budget be balanced responsibly through budget cuts alone, or does next year's budget require that some new fees and taxes be passed to achieve balance?

That's it. That's the \$3.2 billion question. That's what will push this debate well past the June 30 deadline. Bear in mind that the worsening economy has caused state tax collections to plummet in May and, probably, June, too. And the worsening economy also means higher state spending in the form of unemployment benefits, additional public assistance, and more health care costs for uninsured Pennsylvanians.

So what do we do now? Continue talking, emailing and calling your State Senator, your State Representative, and with Governor Rendell. Our message is this: **Level-fund libraries next year.** We are not seeking an increase but simply the level funding necessary to sustain good quality library services for their constituents who need these services now more than ever.

But won't we be criticized as unrealistic and greedy? Shouldn't libraries bear some of the burden of this recession by agreeing to cuts?

Well, here are the facts:

For starters, library services amount to 3/10 of 1% of the entire state budget. Level funding library services means appropriating \$94.6 million out of a state budget that likely will be \$27 billion on the low side, or \$29 billion on the high side. In either scenario, \$94.6 million for library services for 12 million Pennsylvanians ought to be an achievable top priority.

Secondly, libraries are bursting at the seams serving the unemployed, their families, and thousands of Pennsylvanians whose library needs are greater now than ever before. Workers have lost home access to the Internet, or never had it to begin with. More and more employers post job openings online and require that applications and resumes be submitted online. The public library is the only place where free Internet access is available, and waiting lists for computer time in the library grow longer every day. State cuts will force libraries to close their doors on folks who need these doors to be open more, not less.

Finally, cuts under either plan will cost Pennsylvania lost federal funds at the very time we're trying to maximize our return from Washington. Governor Rendell's plan will cost us \$1.9 million, and the Senate Republican plan will cost ever more—\$3.8 million in lost federal money. That's our money, too. We all paid it. And it will end up in Idaho and Texas and Massachusetts if we pass these cuts. All the more reason why level funding is so crucial. It preserves good services for all library users and does not throw away valuable federal dollars.

**SHOW YOUR SUPPORT FOR LIBRARIES
TELL YOUR LEGISLATOR WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO YOU
TO KEEP LEVEL FUNDING FOR LIBRARIES**

Write your legislator now!!!

GO TO:

www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/home/sitemap.cfm

Material taken from recent email from Glenn Miller,
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