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6/3/2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington DC 20510

Re: COVID-19 Relief for America's Libraries

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

I write on behalf of the Authors Guild to express our members' support for Congress providing our nation's public libraries with much-needed COVID-19 financial relief. We respectfully request that such assistance be provided directly to state and local governments as part of the aid package for support of essential public services during the crisis created by the pandemic and its impact on our economy.

The Authors Guild is the nation's oldest and largest professional organization of writers. Since our founding in 1912, we have served as the collective voice of American authors and have long supported the rich and diverse literary culture of our country. Our almost 10,000 members include novelists in all genres and categories, nonfiction writers, journalists, historians, and poets. The Guild works to promote the rights and professional interests of authors in various areas, and advocates on issues such as copyright, freedom of expression, and taxation.

Authors and libraries have long had a symbiotic relationship; many authors have grown up and developed their craft in, and are still gladly patrons of, their local libraries. They recognize that libraries are large purchasers of their books. According to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), libraries spend \$4 billion annually on books and other materials. Authors regularly support their local libraries by conducting readings, lectures, and book signings at libraries. The Authors Guild recognizes that supporting libraries not only helps authors, it helps our culture as a whole by maintaining a record of our culture's literary works and providing readers access to them free of charge.

We understand that the medical and financial stresses caused by the pandemic have hindered the ability of public libraries to continue providing their usual social services, since the various shelter-in-place laws have prevented patrons from using the libraries' physical facilities. That doesn't mean the libraries are less needed these days—the opposite, in fact. Libraries are working every day to provide and even increase access to their digital content and e-book offerings, as well as hosting online story times and discussion groups.

Unfortunately, the American Library Association (ALA) is projecting billions of dollars of losses for libraries as a result of COVID-19, and without federal aid, libraries will be forced to make massive cuts in terms of staffing, purchases, and programs. A reduction in the number of librarians means a reduction in book recommendations to patrons—which disadvantages lesser known authors. And if libraries can't afford to buy new books, all authors are harmed. Weakening the libraries would have a ripple effect on the publishing industry and our literary culture as a whole, as well as to the communities they serve.

Specifically, the Authors Guild supports ALA's request for \$2 billion in "fiscal stabilization" funding for libraries through the federal IMLS and thanks the many members of Congress for their bipartisan letters of support. The ALA acknowledges that more than 92% of public library budgets come from state and local sources, and these sources are already stretched thin by the unanticipated costs and lost revenues resulting from COVID-19. The Authors Guild therefore urges Congress to provide the requested relief to public libraries as part of a package of financial relief for the state and local governments that would also address the needs of the local libraries. Providing emergency funding to public libraries as part of the local government structure would allow these entities to more efficiently and effectively address local library needs, particularly in low-income and rural areas.

The Authors Guild and its members thank you for addressing the needs of all Americans where they live and work during this unprecedented health and economic crisis, and for giving our views about the Guild in support of relief for public libraries your careful consideration.

Sincerely,



Mary E. Rasenberger
Executive Director