July 6, 2020

Executive Board
American Library Association

Dear ALA Executive Board,

We are writing on behalf of the Boards of Directors of ACRL, ALSC, Core (ALCTS, LLAMA, and LITA), PLA, and RUSA to share our deep concern about the hardship 28 days of furlough will create for our staff and how the resulting decrease in capacity will impact our ability to reach our goals. We seek to work in partnership with you to ensure a strong future for our Association and would appreciate the opportunity to meet with the ALA Executive Committee to learn more and to work with you to overcome our challenges together.

ALA finances were precarious before the pandemic, with four years of deficit budgets culminating in short-term investments being almost fully depleted. As such, we understand that furloughs were an unavoidable step to address deficits. We applaud ALA for seeking federal PPP and EIDL loans once the pandemic began and for seeking out endowment funds and extended lines of credit for FY21. Longer term, we owe it to our staff to work with you to look strategically at our legacy businesses toward new opportunities so we are not again forced to use furloughs to balance our budget.

Changing economics and evolving community needs over the last dozen years have required libraries to shift and recalibrate in significant ways. Now, as libraries begin phased re-openings, commit to helping their communities, and demonstrate the value of libraries, our shared members ask us—what are ALA’s plans to emerge from its deficit and refine and strengthen its focus?

ALA’s divisions have been challenged by changing needs and economies, too. Examples of division strategic realignment are the Core merger and plans for ASGCLA and RUSA reorganization. By the end of FY21, we will have moved from 11 divisions to six or seven. Divisions, by policy and good stewardship, manage budgets that allow for investment in the programs that have impact while maintaining division fund balances that allow a level of financial security. When sustainability is challenged, divisions are reassessing to find new ways of working and new paths forward.

Like the ALA Executive Board, our division boards have a deep commitment to serving our members and ensuring a sustainable future for the ALA and its essential work. We are all adapting to a “new normal” and more than ever, we need to work in partnership to develop strategy and to communicate that strategy and our vision widely. We understand furloughs are unavoidable now yet we are very mindful of the harm they do to our staff members and to ALA’s ability to be there for libraries and library workers. We very much appreciate the recent Council resolution made in support of our staff. We would like to begin work quickly and collaboratively to build on that support and work to prevent future furloughs in FY22 and beyond.

The ALA Executive Board is working hard, through Forward Together, virtual membership meetings, and in other ways to address the many critical issues the association is facing. We would appreciate learning more about your longer term plans. We respectfully request a joint meeting between ALA Executive
Committee and division leaders to better understand and support sustainable plans for the future. Thank you for considering our request and for your commitment to ALA, library workers, and libraries.

Sincerely,

Jon E. Cawthorne, Ph.D., ACRL President, on behalf of the ACRL Board of Directors
Christopher Cronin, ALCTS President, on behalf of the ALCTS/Core Board of Directors
Kirby McCurtis, ALSC President, on behalf of the ALSC Board of Directors
Evviva Weinraub Lajoie, LITA President, on behalf of the LITA/Core Board of Directors
Tyler Dzuba, LLAMA President, on behalf of the LLAMA/Core Board of Directors
Michelle Jeske, PLA President, on behalf of the PLA Board of Directors
Courtney Greene McDonald, RUSA President, on behalf of the RUSA Board of Directors