March 24, 2020

Governor Kim Reynolds
1007 East Grand Ave.
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

Dear Governor Reynolds:

The Iowa Library Association has a long history of advocating for libraries of all types across Iowa. We have members across the state representing many of the over 1,500 public, academic and special libraries in Iowa.

Given the current public health disaster emergency declared by your office on March 17, the Iowa Library Association is concerned that emergency declarations have left out libraries as institutions that need to close to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19. Libraries are community hubs for patrons increasing the risk of spread to patrons and library staff. The closure of restaurants and bars, and other popular gathering places, along with the prior closure of schools, will continue to put a strain on the lives and health of patrons and staff in libraries that are still open. Library buildings are not conducive to social distancing and disinfecting to the degree needed to curb the spread of the virus is not feasible at this time. It is not possible to maintain the six-foot rule nor the 10-person gathering rule inside of libraries. Even in our smallest communities and their libraries, the chance of community spread is possible. We realize the negative impact closing libraries will have on all communities, but especially those in the small towns. Despite this, we feel an abundance of caution is warranted at this time.

Libraries are able to provide resources to their communities through digital resources like e-books. Additionally, libraries across the state, including the Des Moines Public Library, have extended the range of their WIFI outside their buildings so patrons may still access the internet while practicing social distancing.

Some libraries have been able to close to the public or students, but this still subjects staff to undue risk as they are required to work in close contact with colleagues or interact with materials and surfaces that are unable to be thoroughly sanitized. So we once again are asking you to expand the emergency declarations to include libraries across the state to protect everyone.

Iowa librarians and the Iowa Library Association want to work with you to ensure that Iowa residents and library staff stay safe during this public health emergency. We look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Mara Strickler
ILA President

Stacy Goodhue
ILA President-Elect

Dan Chibnall
ILA Past President