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## **May 1, 2020 Nebraska Library Association statement on protecting library staff**

In this time of crisis and uncertainty, reliable information and community support are among our most trusted and valuable resources. Librarians and library workers provide access to these services across our state every day. The Nebraska Library Association (NLA) strongly supports and celebrates the numerous contributions that are made by these information professionals every day. Those contributions take many forms including; trusted information resources, entertainment, early childhood education, job seeking assistance, information literacy support, skill building and more.

NLA recognizes that the dangers posed by the COVID-19 virus outweigh the benefits of continuing to operate public-facing libraries and information organizations with in-person services. NLA supports the decisions to close the doors to those facilities until public health and medical professionals deem it safe to re-open. At the same time, NLA encourages all government, business and academic leaders to take a long-term view and begin preparations for dealing with the aftermath of the pandemic. A critical step in this process includes retaining and fully compensating library workers regardless of their position within their organization.

Library workers can continue to be productive remotely, as well as in buildings that remain closed to the public. Digital and phone-related services can help connect patrons at all levels to the digital environments. In addition, many libraries have projects that have been on the back burner until there is sufficient time to tackle them, like inventory or rearranging collections.

Layoffs and furloughs undermine libraries' important work in preparing their communities to learn, connect, evaluate information and thrive during any extenuating circumstances. Libraries that layoff staff now will see communities less prepared for the subsequent outbreaks of COVID-19 that many public health officials now fear will come later in 2020.

Libraries, in many cases, are the only organizations actively educating and providing services to their communities during this time. Education, outreach and internet access are critical to the community for our marginalized populations – the elderly, the young, low- and middle-class families, those experiencing homelessness, survivors of domestic violence, new immigrants, English language learners and more. It may be more important now than ever that libraries are allowed to continue this work through virtual programming, digital access to information literacy education materials, outreach to facilities and homebound individuals, and technology support to the communities. Because libraries are a trusted resource, they can share much needed and reliable health information along with learning resources while remaining socially distanced from their audiences. It is for these reasons that NLA urges the full retention of library staff who are actively connecting with their communities. Support for the communities of Nebraska should be paramount.

In addition, NLA believes that library workers matter more during the times of recovery from a national catastrophe. Libraries have been and will continue to be the heart of the communities, and to serve as hubs for people seeking unemployment/job search/resume development assistance. Libraries are major outlets for municipal information at all levels.

NLA calls on every employer in Nebraska to support all library workers by recognizing their value to the community, to retain them as employees regardless of position in the organization and to involve them in the post-pandemic planning that is vital for all libraries.