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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Five Library Branches to Be Closed Due to Funding Cut Backs**

Following a special meeting of the Board of Library Trustees, the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County announced that a number of dramatic cost-saving measures must be instituted including the closure of five of its 41 branch libraries on September 1. These actions are necessitated by a \$4.3 million total reduction in funding from the state Library and Local Government Support Fund (LLGSF) during 2002. Typically 95% of the Library's \$52.5 million budget comes from state personal income taxes, which are running about 7% lower than last year.

The branch libraries to be closed are Bond Hill, Deer Park, Elmwood Place, Greenhills, and Mount Healthy. The branches selected for closure are all small facilities (from 1,596 to 4,400 square feet) that are each located within 1.5 to 2.6 miles of another branch library. The proximity of these facilities to other branches will enable the Library to continue providing quality service with minimum inconvenience to customers. With the exception of the Bond Hill Branch, all of these facilities are leased. Staff at these branches will be transferred into other positions opened during a hiring freeze that has been in effect since the LLGSF reduction was announced. The annual operating savings realized by these closures will be \$1.5 million.

“This was a very difficult decision but the Library's first priority is maintaining the quality of our services, which is not directly proportional to the number of facilities – the Main Library and 41 library branches. In fact, operating such a large number of facilities may be preventing better quality of service,” said Executive Director Kimber L. Fender. “And, without a continuous flow of new capital dollars, we may soon be unable to properly maintain any of our facilities. Reducing the number of branches, thereby reducing both operation and maintenance costs, will allow a shift in focus to service improvements, and hopefully provide a better chance to generate dollars for the maintenance of existing facilities and the future construction of new buildings.”

The Library will also proceed with other cuts to the operating budget as required to generate a total operating savings of \$2.2 million. Some savings have been realized by year-to-date expenditures under budget. Additional cuts will be evaluated for the impact they have on library service. Among these are continuation of a hiring freeze, limiting supply purchases to only critical/emergency items, reducing purchased or contracted services to those already under contract or emergency services only, decreasing contracted security services, and generating utility savings through temperature adjustments and alternative energy sources. Other cost savings include postponing planned expenditures for equipment, furniture, and a vehicle as well as cancellation of back-up lines for some computer functions.

The Board also re-evaluated pending capital projects in consideration of the long-term impact on operating expenses. Accordingly, the Library will proceed with only two capital projects. First, efforts will continue on completing computer system improvements with the purchase and installation of an Integrated Library System. “Although this project is being funded with capital dollars, it is really a service improvement,” said Ms. Fender. “A Library’s computer system is at the heart of library service and access to the collection. It is a critical component, used by library customers and employees alike. Our present system cannot support current technology and the purchase and implementation of a new integrated library system will provide a vast improvement in service. I want to emphasize that while we are cutting back in some areas, we’re also aggressively moving ahead to guarantee delivery of the best possible services for our customers.” Second, the Library will move forward on construction of a new St. Bernard Branch Library. “While this facility is a new building, it will allow closure of both the existing St. Bernard and Elmwood Place rental facilities, resulting in little if any increase in staffing. For this reason and because completion of this project will fulfill a long-standing commitment to the City of St. Bernard, which donated the property, we will go forward with this project.”

All remaining planned and pending capital projects will be put on hold and reviewed as circumstances warrant. This includes a proposed special purpose library in the Trailside Nature Center, new Reading Branch Library to replace a small rental facility, Bond Hill Branch and Computer Training Center, Woodlawn Branch, expansion of parking for both the Mt. Washington and Westwood branch libraries, and expansion of the Clifton Branch leased space.

“Even as the economy improves,” Ms. Fender stated, “it is unlikely that the LLGSF will be able to meet the needs of the Library as it grows into the future. To be fully prepared for the

realities of funding shortfalls, the Library will be working to creatively develop alternative sources of funding, including corporate donations and sponsorships, as well as grants and gifts from loyal Library users.”

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