CINCINNATI – The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County Board of Trustees has affirmed a plan from the Library’s leadership team to make staffing changes due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

The Library is reducing hours for 435 non-exempt staff in paygrades 1-6 down to 25 percent, and is furloughing an additional 106 staff in paygrade 1 who typically work 12 or fewer hours per week. The Library currently employs 839 individuals. In addition, overall staff compensation for 2020 was already reduced by 3 percent as a result of delaying previously approved merit increases. The Library leadership team is taking a 5-10 percent reduction in salary, and the Eva Jane Romaine Coombe Library Director is taking a 15 percent reduction. The reduction in hours and furloughs amount to a weekly savings of approximately $167,800.

These reductions and the furlough take effect Sunday, May 3, 2020 and continue for an indefinite amount of time; however, the Library leadership team intends to evaluate the situation continuously. The Library is continuing to pay the full employer benefit contribution for medical and dental premiums for all staff with reduced hours. Reduced hours staff will also continue to earn credit for the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System at a prorated rate.

The exact funding loss for the Library during the remainder of 2020 is unknown at this moment, as approximately half of the Library’s revenues come from the state of Ohio through the Public Library Fund, while the other half comes from Hamilton County taxpayers via two levies. Current projections range from an $8 million to $12 million gap in the budget, a projection that represents a 20–30 percent reduction of Public Library Fund and approximately 10–15 percent of the budget overall.

Addressing this shortfall is no small matter and a variety of budget savings have become necessary. This decision also is part of a larger effort to curtail expenses from multiple parts of the budget to cover reduced revenues. A variety of operational savings have been realized during the closure, primarily security costs and consumable supplies. Additional budget savings beyond personnel are needed, and will be identified and addressed in the coming weeks. The time-sensitive nature of the CARES Act led the Library to prioritize staffing decisions, as senior leaders and the board wanted to ensure this funding was available to staff impacted by these personnel changes.

Staff who are not being furloughed or having hours reduced are those staff members whose full scope of work is able to be accomplished remotely at this time and/or whose work supports critical tasks that enable the Library to continue to function while our facilities are closed. This decision was not taken lightly and occurred after careful research and deliberation.

“I am incredibly proud of the Library’s staff. Last year when we engaged with the community for the Facility Master Plan project, everywhere I went community members told me how much they valued and appreciated our staff,” said Paula Brehm-Heeger, the Eva Jane Romaine Coombe Library Director. “The pandemic has left us with no good choices, and making this difficult decision is especially distressing. I am heartened, however,
when I recall how together we have risen to meet past challenges, and I know that our collective passion and perseverance will carry us through these extraordinary times together, too.”

These actions do not affect any services the Library is currently providing. Library buildings have been closed since March 13, and will remain closed through at least May 3. While the Library buildings have been closed, the Library has been focusing on expanding access to digital materials, offering programming through videos and live-streams, and creating new services like one-on-one appointments with staff to get personalized help with job issues, small business assistance, and even appointments with a social worker. Visit CincinnatiLibrary.org or call 513-369-6900 to schedule an appointment. Phones are operated 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday through Wednesday; 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Thursday through Saturday; and 1-5 p.m. Sunday.

As shared in a blog post last week, the Library is actively working on a recovery and re-opening plan, and is following state and national guidelines on how to proceed. “Ramping back up hours for staff, and calling furloughed staff back to work, depends on variables that are out of our control, such as the health of our staff, the actual reduction of revenue over projections, the status of the state’s stay-at-home order and physical distancing measures, what the scientific community can learn about how long the virus can live on surfaces, and the availability of cleaning and physical distancing supplies and equipment,” said Brehm-Heeger.

For updates about Library services and responses during this time, visit CincinnatiLibrary.org/COVID19 or follow us on social media @cincylibrary.

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**About the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County**

The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County is one of the oldest, largest, and busiest libraries in the United States. We serve a population of more than 800,000 people with a collection of more than nine million items. Our mission is to connect people with the world of ideas and information. To learn more, visit CincinnatiLibrary.org or call 513-369-6900.