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Honorable Chris Jones

Re: Library of Virginia Budget Cuts and Closures

Dear Chris:

I am writing to request your assistance in restoring budget funding to the Library of Virginia – the repository of Virginia’s history and the primary facility for historical research in Virginia.

Governor McAuliffe’s latest round of budget cuts have fallen disproportionately on the Library of Virginia. The Library has been forced to lay off 15 staff , including most of the archival staff who have historically helped researchers, and has been forced to close Saturdays and Mondays, leaving it open to the public only Tuesday – Fridays.

No other state agency has seen layoffs or reduced hours of this kind (no other agency under the Secretary of Education had any layoffs) but the repeated cuts to the Library’s budget since 2008 have left it no alternatives.

Closing the Library to the public on Saturdays prevents the average working citizen in Virginia from using its research facilities. I have been a researcher at the Library of Virginia for over 40 years, often researching at the Library on Saturdays. I have served 15 years on the Library Board, including service as its Chair in 2003-2004 and 2014-2015. I have also been active as an officer or director of a number of nonprofit societies and foundations focused on Virginia history, including past service as a President of the Virginia Genealogical Society. I mention this only because I can assure you that historical research at the Library of Virginia, and the public’s access to the Library’s records, is an issue of great concern for thousands of Virginians.

Please restore the Library’s budget funding to levels to permit at least its 2000-2008 staffing levels.

As background, please consider the following:

1. In 2008 the Library had 195 full-time and 45 part-time employees. After the most recent cuts, the Library will have 111 full-time and 8 part-time employees. No other state agency has seen anything remotely close to reductions of this relative size.
2. The Library’s current funding structure gives it no discretionary funds. The great bulk of state funding received by the Library flows through to local public libraries – and the Library of Virginia cannot charge any administrative fees on these funds. The Library’s largest expense item is rent (at inflated rates) which it must pay to the Department of General Services, but the Library has been prohibited from reducing its rent payments. These structural issues should be addressed in the long term.

3. The Library has not been fully funded for decades – and as a result there is a massive backlog of public records which are inaccessible to researchers. The estimated “archival backlog” was reduced to 20 years at one point, but is likely over 40 years now. While priority has been given to providing access to recent Governor’s records, other public records may be inaccessible for 40 years before they can be processed and made available to the public for research.
4. The Library is supposed to be the Commonwealth’s reference library for research; but its budget cuts have left it with an acquisitions budget for new publications which is far less than many local branch public libraries.
5. The Library has a national reputation as one of the leading historical research facilities in the country. It consistently ranks as one of the most visited attractions in Richmond, bringing thousands of researchers to Virginia each year to use its facilities. National genealogical conferences in 2007 and 2014, focused on the Library, brought thousands of researchers to Richmond. The state will incur significant losses in tourism revenue as a result of these staff cuts and Saturday closures which will effectively prevent such conferences or individual weekend research visits in the future.

In addition to restoring budget funding to the Library, there are some changes to the Library’s legislation which would help guarantee patron access to the Library, and Library priorities, in the long term. I hope that you will consider introducing or co-patroning such legislation. Specifically Va. Code §42.1-9 should be amended to require that the Library be open to the public for research, without charge to any researchers, from 9 to 5 on Saturday and weekdays (except when closure is necessary for special events, state or national holidays or maintenance). In addition, the duties of the Library in Va. Code §42.1-1 should be expanded to expressly include providing services to the public for historical and genealogical research, and include the collection and preservation of private records of historical interest and include local government records (in addition to state public archival and historical materials).

I hope that you will act to preserve Virginia’s rich history and to ensure that it is accessible to all Virginians. Please restore funding to the Library of Virginia for the next budget year, and consider amending its legislation to help assure that Virginia’s history is made accessible.

Sincerely,



Peter E. Broadbent, Jr.

Former Chair, Library of Virginia

Former President, Virginia Genealogical Society