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# ALA American Library Association

The Honorable Carlos A. Gimenez  
Mayor of Miami-Dade County  
Office of the Mayor  
Stephen P. Clark Center  
111 NW 1st Street  
Miami, FL 33128

March 18, 2014

Dear Mayor Gimenez,

On behalf of the American Library Association (ALA) and the Public Library Association (PLA), a division of ALA, we want to thank you for the invitation to serve on the Blue Ribbon Taskforce to study the future of the Miami-Dade Public Library. As the presidents of national organizations, we have a unique opportunity to observe and learn from the experiences of public libraries across the nation, and we know that you are not alone in your struggle to best serve your residents in times of limited resources. We commend you on your forward thinking.

Based on our review of the options presented to the advisory committee, we strongly urge you to approve the \$50 million proposal that will be presented to you on March 19, 2014. We urge you to reject the option that would further reduce funding for the library to \$30 million.

The reduction in services that would result from the reduction of the library's budget by \$20 million would have a significant negative impact on the residents of the county, in particular on the children of the county, and would jeopardize the very future of the community. For the many in your community without internet access at home, without access to books and printed materials, who are learning English, seeking job resources or a safe haven after school, the Miami-Dade Public Library serves as a gateway to education, to aspirations, and to self-sufficiency.

Given your county's unique geographic location and cultural makeup, we believe that Miami-Dade Public Library is playing an even more significant national role: for many, it is serving as a gateway to America, providing essential free and equitable access to information and opportunity for success, regardless of race, sex, age or gender. Through its fundamental services, the Miami-Dade County Library conveys what it means to live in a democracy and to be an American.

We applaud your decision to keep all 49 branches open, but must emphasize that it is not enough to have open doors: the library needs an adequate materials budget – both print and electronic – to adequately meet the educational needs of the people of Miami-Dade. At present, your materials budget of \$800,000 translates into only .03 per capita for each of your 2.5 million residents. This represents one of the lowest per capita materials expenditure rates in the nation.

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We commend Library Director Raymond Santiago for his creativity in providing a range of services to the people of Miami-Dade with such a constrained budget, and must note that, in our experience, even an annual budget of \$50 million is not enough to adequately support the needs of the people of Miami-Dade. While a \$50 million budget will have a real impact on those who need library service most, including children, the elderly and underserved populations, a further \$20 million reduction will, in our opinion, leave a hollow shell in place of the fine public library system that you have created and which has been a source of well-deserved community pride.

We truly believe that libraries everywhere have the power to change lives and improve communities, and we believe that at the Miami-Dade Public Library, the American Dream is very much alive. We ask that you fund the library so that it can remain a vital asset to the people of Miami-Dade, and to our country.

Respectfully,



Barbara Stripling  
2013-2014 President  
American Library Association



Carolyn A. Anthony  
2013-2014 President  
Public Library Association