

OLC Board of Directors Recommends Temporarily Closing Public Library Facilities to the General Public

Thursday, March 19, 2020

The Ohio Library Council Board of Directors met last night by conference call and voted to strongly recommend Ohio's public libraries temporarily close their library facilities to the general public to ensure the safety and well-being of public library customers and staff and to prevent exposure to the Coronavirus (COVID-19).

The OLC understands that choosing to close buildings to the public is an extremely difficult decision to make, but one that must be made if we are to take the health, safety and well-being of all Ohioans seriously. As Gov. Mike DeWine said yesterday:

"With or without a test, the virus is here, it lives among us, and we must be at war with it. And we're at war with a very, very dangerous, lethal enemy. This virus's mission is to reproduce, and for it to go from person to person, it needs our help. It cannot do its damage without us. We become the enablers. We become the ones who make it able to jump from person to person to person. We have it within our own control how fast this spreads, and how widespread it spreads. We have within our hands not only our own safety, but the safety of our fellow citizens. This enemy is dangerous, it is relentless, and it is using us as its host, and it is using us to survive, to multiply, to go from person to person. But we do have it within our ability to fight back. When you stop moving, when I stop moving, it stops moving. It can't reach someone else. So each one of us must do all we can to limit our exposure and we must stop this enemy."

As of this morning, more than 187 of Ohio's 251 public library systems have announced some form of closure to the public. In addition, we are hearing reports of libraries having difficulty securing cleaning supplies to maintain safe surfaces and unable to buy temporal thermometers to check for fevers. Individuals are not consistently following the social distancing guidelines as prescribed by the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Maintaining a safe and clean environment is critical to stopping the spread of this virus.

There have been wide spread closures and cancellations around our state to help stop the spread of this virus. We saw how the mandatory closures of universities, K-12 schools, gyms, and rec centers only increased the demand on public library services.

We also need to consider the high-risk populations that libraries often serve and how this could impact them.

We know that physical items were circulated through our libraries 152.9 million times last year and that people walked through our doors 67.5 million times. Based on the research we are seeing for how long the virus can remain infectious on surfaces and considering the millions of library materials circulated throughout the state, our goal is to make sure everyone is safe and that is why we are recommending libraries close their buildings to the public.

As leaders and advocates for Ohio's public libraries, the OLC Board also established two Ad Hoc Committees to address critical issues that will be impacting our membership in the coming weeks and months as we work our way through this period – one will review the safety guidelines of handling library materials and the other will examine the library workforce and HR issues as they relate to the pandemic.

In addition, national organizations including the American Library Association (ALA), the Urban Library Council (ULC) and the Association for Rural and Small Libraries (ARSL) have all issued national statements encouraging libraries to temporarily close their buildings to the public as the result of COVID-19.

OLC is encouraging all of its members to take this opportunity to highlight your digital resources, WiFi capabilities outside of your buildings, reference services by phone or email and focus on your alternative service delivery approaches. A number of these resources are highlighted on the [OLC website](#).

We know Ohio's public libraries are the best systems in the country! Now is the time for us to shine and be leaders during these unprecedented times by keeping our community and our employees safe and to help prevent the spread of this disease.