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Testimony before City Council on the proposed FY2010 Free Library General Fund Budget

President Anna Verna and members of City Council, my name is Amy Dougherty and I am the Director of the Friends of the Free Library of Philadelphia, Inc. (FFL), a nonprofit since 1973 whose mission is to support the Free Library through patron volunteers. Thank you for holding public hearings on the FY2010 General Fund budget and for your interest in keeping all 54 library branches open and operating.

My aim today is to clarify the library's present General Fund allocation and what the administration is proposing for FY2010 and beyond. As you know, the Library took a 20% cut in the re-balancing of the 2009 budget. While all libraries remain open, the 20% (\$8 million) reduction has created enormous strain on the staff, increased unscheduled closings, and reduced the number of programs at branches. **On the surface, the Mayor's 2010 budget appears to hold the line on further drastic reductions. However, a close look shows this is not the case. First, the Library has already taken a disproportionate cutback. The 2009 cut of 20% already creates a barebones situation. The Mayor's proposed FY2010 budget and 5 year financial plan continues this recent slide to the library's General Fund.** To clarify where we have been and where we are presently, a brief history:

1. The City Council approved FY09 budget allocated \$40,245,000 to the Free Library's General Fund. This amount represented a \$314,000 reduction of the Library's actual FY08 expenditure.
2. The Mayor's projection for the Library's FY09 expenditure is \$36,984,508 following the Nov. 2009 re-balancing.
3. The proposed FY10 General Fund Free Library budget is \$32,968, 000, more than \$4 million below 2009 expected expenditures.

The results of the proposed cuts to the Free Library's 2010 General Fund Budget are as follows:

1. **Staffing Level** — represents approx. 85% of general fund budget
 - Library personnel had been and, if this budget is approved, will continue to be reduced by 100 filled positions to 628, down from 713 in June 2008.
 - Mayor Nutter's 5 Year Plan proposes that the Free Library's staffing level reduction to 628 remain in effect throughout FY2014. (A brief history of the Free Library's staffing level shows: 702 staffers in 1975; 681 in 1995; 734 in 2000; 640 in 2005; 724 in 2007; 713 in 2008.)
2. **Materials** — represents approx. 12% of general fund budget
 - In FY09, due to the budget cut, the library's purchase of books and other material resources was reduced by 25%; no purchases of adult or children's books in FY2008-09
 - The proposed FY10 budget threatens the State Aid to Library annual subsidy of between \$8-10 million which requires that 12% of the total expenditures go towards materials.
3. **Operating Hours**
 - 49 branches and the three regional libraries will provide 5 full days of service per week instead of 6 or 7 day service, respectively.
 - Central Library will continue to maintain 65 hours per week service to comply with mandated State Aid to Library operating standards.

As you are aware, the economic downturn has increased library patronage in Philadelphia and throughout the nation by 65%, according to the Wall Street Journal. Our citizen's love their libraries as evidenced by the huge public protest against the proposed closures of 11 library branches last year. Because of this,

permanent and temporary library closures are now off the table. Since November, when FFL and a majority of City Council called for shared sacrifice throughout the 54 branch system, we have thankfully come full circle. FFL lives in the real world, and understands that this budget crisis, while easing, is not over. So the question is this: Are you satisfied that there is no other alternative to a balanced budget other than gutting the library system for the next 5 years?

If you approve this budget, you will have, in effect, agreed that; ‘yes, we will balance the budget on the backs of our children’s safety and education as well as the general public’s educational, employment, and other life-long goals and potential.’

To re-cap: Mayor Nutter’s proposed FY10 budget requests Council approval of \$32,968,000 for the Free Library’s General Fund. This is a reduction of approx. 20% or \$7,277,000. I would recommend that City Council vote to increase this amount by restoring some of the funding lost in the 2009 20% budget cut. Restoring even 10% of that reduction (essentially leaving the system with a 10% overall cut), would help considerably to stabilize the Library system and ensure that every Philadelphian has adequate library services.

FFL understands how challenging the city’s financial situation is and is therefore requesting that the Library receive similar reductions to other city services. Instead of a 20% or a \$7-plus million reduction, consider a 10% reduction of \$3.5 million. The Free Library’s educational and job-readiness programs for our children and families compel you to consider a less drastic measure.

What we all have learned from Philadelphia’s public outcry over the proposed closure of 11 branch libraries is that libraries are more than a place to borrow books. They offer and embody unique and positive educational, economic, social, and cultural resources to the entire neighborhood; children, seniors, and job seekers included. Library branches offer thousands of yearly programs and are where the community meets.

- Branch libraries are community centers and central to stable strong communities.
- Branch libraries are, in effect, public, private, charter, & parochial school libraries.
- Branch libraries are safe havens for children and where they go for homework help, research, and positive recreational activities.
- Branch libraries provide internet access for youth, seniors, and all of us who make up the more than 50% of those who are without computers or digital resources.
- Branch libraries offer resources and staff assistance with job readiness and searches.
- Branch libraries offer programs, materials, and assistance for Philadelphia’s large illiterate population, children and adults, and help them to improve print and computer literacy.
- Branch libraries are often the only safe, free, and open public building in neighborhoods for community and club meetings, and are especially important in blighted communities.

Branch libraries help fulfill Mayor Nutter’s 5 year goals and provide solutions to some of the city’s most dire challenges such as closing the digital divide; supporting all schools – (pre)school readiness, increasing high school graduates, college prep; employment support with job training, readiness, searches; safe affordable indoor community meeting places; and helping individuals and families reach their future hopes and life-long potential. The people of the City have been clear. Library service needs to be protected by government. It is the kind of public good that everyone supports. Our branches, librarians, and neighbors need your leadership and help to get a community acceptable baseline of funding on line for the Free Library this year. Thank you for your attention.