



Community Advocates for Libraries in Miami

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For Immediate Release

CALM urges Commissioners to stay at set millage cap

July 16, 2014 - We are grateful for the overwhelming support the community has shown over these past few months for fully-funding the Miami-Dade Public Library System at \$64 million. This support was heavily demonstrated during yesterday's 11 hour meeting, where over 100 people spoke yesterday to advocate for libraries. Over the past few months over 4,000 petitions were signed by homeowners who asked the Commission to raise taxes for the sake of Libraries; just a few weeks ago, over 80% of 5,200 people polled recently by the Knight Foundation and Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce opposed library cuts.

Without a doubt, their voices made a difference in the overall outcome.

While yesterday's Budget Meeting did not fulfill our goals of fully-funding the Miami-Dade Public Library System, we thank Commissioner Xavier Suarez's for leading the motion, and thank Commissioner Barbara Jordan, Commissioner Jean Monestime, Commissioner Dennis Moss, and Commissioner Bruno Barreiro, for their votes. We would also like to thank Commissioner Barreiro for separating the votes on the millage rates to ensure each allocation of our County's budget was voted on for its own merit.

We are disappointed in the Commissioners who voted against the motion for full-funding, but would also like to extend our gratitude to Commissioner Heyman, whose counter proposal for funding at \$53 million that subsequently passed will save librarian's jobs and prevent further cuts to services.

Some Commissioners and the Mayor disavowed knowledge of the source of the requested \$64 million budget. This number has been available for some time; it was a proposal deliberated, analyzed and finally advocated for by the Friends of the Miami Dade Public Library and the Library Advisory Board. The Mayor's own Blue Ribbon Panel on MDPLS recommended a millage that would both maintain—and enhance—library service. All these groups - along with a county-wide Coalition consisting of multiple associations, interest groups, and organizations - supported this budget in order to provide the community with enhanced services appropriate for the world-class library system we once had, and would have began the recovery from drastic cuts that have occurred over the past 3 years.

A \$53 million budget keeps libraries essentially at the status quo. At their September 18th vote, in order to maintain the current levels of service, we urge Commissioners to commit to the set millage cap of .2480 determined yesterday for the Library Department. This level of funding can ensure no layoffs will occur in an already severely short-staffed Library System.

However, a \$53 million allotted budget is still inadequate to fund a recovery from the last few years of budget cuts. There will be little money left to buy new children's books and little money to provide maintenance for failing library facilities. There remains little money for technology upgrades, or for successful programs like Project LEAD, Connections, and YOUmedia Miami – programs that would either expand the scope of the library further and create the "community center" libraries of the future that so many Commissioners continue to demand, but are apparently unwilling to fund.

During yesterday's meeting, the Mayor purposefully misdirected the Commission and the public in this budget process. His proposal relies on contingencies from unions that may never occur. Libraries have now been placed squarely in the middle of a long-time fight he has with county employees. This is no way to establish budget priorities, and certainly no way to manage a diverse county of 2.6 million residents—many of whom rely on the services that the Mayor is willing to slash.

It is the belief of CALM that the Mayor views libraries as a political tool, rather than a valued community asset. Stronger leadership is needed both in this administration and the Commission to ensure county infrastructure is not continually subject to the threats of cuts and layoffs.

We will move forward to ensure that county residents understand that their Library funding may still yet be subject to a Mayoral veto and/or further cuts determined at a September 18 vote. We ask them to reach out to their district Commissioner to support no further cuts to the Library budget.

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