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January 25, 2021

Governor Gretchen Whitmer
State of Michigan
P.O. Box 30013
Lansing, Michigan 48909

Elizabeth Hertel, Director
Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
333 S. Grand Ave.
P.O. Box 30195
Lansing, Michigan 48909

Dear Governor Whitmer and Ms. Hertel,

In our role as a leader and advocate for all libraries in Michigan, the Michigan Library Association (MLA) writes to each of you today to request prioritization of all library workers as essential service providers in the vaccine rollout program.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines place our school and academic library workers in Phase 1b of the vaccine rollout, but our public library and archive workers in Phase 1c. While we recognize that Michigan and our county health departments are afforded the opportunity to make state and local decisions on vaccine distribution, we are counting on you both to provide your leadership in recognizing the unwavering and vital services that all of our libraries provide to citizens and students in all 83 Michigan counties. We want to ensure that public and academic library workers in communities where libraries have already re-opened to in-person services, or plan to do so, are eligible for vaccination in Phase 1b as well. (We noted that K-12 school personnel, which includes library workers, are already called out in Phase 1b of the Michigan COVID-19 Vaccination Interim Prioritization Guidance – January 6, 2021.)

After the first stay-at-home orders were issued in March 2020, many libraries closed their physical doors to in-person services in the interest of combatting community spread, with virtual services remaining, and even increasing: online story time, redirected expenditure toward increased e-books, remote/phone reference/research service, and more. Today, library workers continue to rise to the call to support their communities and their schools. Of critical note is the fact that the pandemic magnified digital inequities among our most vulnerable and disenfranchised citizens who rely heavily on libraries for access to reliable information and services, and personalized coaching to navigate digital resources, including: computer access and support; circulating hotspots, laptops and materials which

are heavily relied on by students and educators. In addition, libraries serve as printing and faxing destinations for people who are submitting unemployment claims and COVID-19 test results; when applying for housing and food assistance programs; and completing aid applications to save local businesses; and so much more.

This critical work cannot be accomplished without the front-line library workers who are at high risk of contracting or unintentionally spreading COVID-19 as a result of their work in these institutions. Library workers have been, and remain, in close contact with the public, students and co-workers on a daily basis. With your help to get them vaccinated earlier, public and academic libraries can resume services while maintaining the safety of staff and the communities that they serve.

We also want to bring your attention to the updated guidelines of the Department of Homeland Security's Advisory Memorandum on Ensuring Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers' Ability to Work During the COVID-19 Response¹ (Version 4, December 2020, page 11) where they list media specialists and librarians and where they also "support prioritization decisions related to COVID-19 vaccines, especially in the early stages when the vaccines are in short supply."

We know that here in Michigan, you have placed emphasis on both protecting people at increased risk for severe COVID-19 illness and ensuring the continued functioning of essential services in the community including those in health care and our schools. At the same time, we urge you to acknowledge that library workers are at substantially higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 because their work-related duties must be performed on site and they involve being in close proximity (i.e., within 6 feet) to the public and to coworkers.

The MLA board, staff, and our 1900 members in Michigan respectfully request you to expedite eligibility of vaccinations for all library workers and to include them in Phase 1b of the Michigan vaccine rollout.

Thank you for your consideration and if I can answer any questions you might have, please feel free to contact me at dmikula@milibraries.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah E. Mikula". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Deborah E. Mikula
Executive Director

¹ <https://www.cisa.gov/publication/guidance-essential-critical-infrastructure-workforce>