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Wednesday, January 27, 2021

The Honorable Jay Inslee
Governor of Washington State
Office of the Governor
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Inslee:

The Washington Library Association would like to commend you on your statewide leadership and continued work on COVID-19 relief efforts. As you continue working with the Washington Department of Health on the phasing of vaccine administration, we ask that **library workers** be included in PHASE 1B - Tier 2 and PHASE 1B - Tier 4.

After the “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order was issued in March 2020, many libraries closed our doors to in-person public 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 service, and more. As the Safe Start Washington plan began to re-open the state, we too have reopened gradually to in-person public service, starting with curbside pick-up of library materials, capacity limits based on retail guidelines as advised by this department, limited time for computer use and assistance, and other reference services including helping people fill out necessary governmental application forms (notary, passports), access job retraining and application resources, and so on. These are all services that high-risk critical workers covered in “congregate settings” perform; libraries perform them too.

We have been gratified by the public demand for our collections, services, and programs. No one wants the library to be fully open more than librarians ourselves. Sadly, as cases have surged again, some are having to close our doors again, as staff members are diagnosed and/or the spread in our communities has increased. In order to continue to respond fully to residents’ needs, it is vital that library staff receive vaccines. We want libraries to continue to serve as key partners in the re-opening of our state, and we want to do so safely for the sake of the library staff and their families, and also to prevent the library, where so many members of the public gather, from becoming a point of community spread.

Since April 2020, the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services has funded and supported an important research partnership with OCLC and Battelle on “REopening Archives, Libraries, and Museums” (REALM) to help sector leaders understand and mitigate risk to staff and patrons from



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potential exposure to the coronavirus on materials they circulate and surfaces in their facilities. [The REALM project](#) has tested a variety of common and frequently used library, archives, and museum materials to determine how long the virus can survive on exposed surfaces and collections in archives, libraries, and museums.

Through [rigorous testing](#), the REALM project has found that for books and paper, the Coronavirus that causes COVID-19 can exist for as little as one day on a hardback book and is detectable for as long as 8 days for archival leather and synthetic materials. On plastics and vinyl, it can be as long as 8 days as well. Other hard plastics like DVD cases can find detectable traces of the virus through the 6th day. Common materials for surfaces and fixtures like glass, marble, laminate, and steel surfaces can see the virus survive for nearly a week.

In light of REALM's findings, many libraries have instituted proactive materials handling and quarantine protocols to isolate books, media, and other materials that may have been in the possession of an infected patron, along with cleaning protocols for public and staff areas. While these protective protocols are important and necessary during the pandemic, the most effective mitigation would be to inoculate librarians and library workers in PHASE 1B - Tier 2 and PHASE 1B - Tier 4.

Library workers **are** essential workers and keep key social infrastructure running safely. Whether it is curbside, broadband, virtual programming, printing, access to restrooms, or books by mail – the demand is incredibly high for library services and the staff need to be able to safely deliver those services to the community.

On behalf of the Washington Library Association and our 1,150 members across Washington and representing libraries of all kinds, thank you for your commitment to libraries and for your consideration of our request as you continue the phased administration of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Danielle Miller'.

Danielle Miller, WLA President
Washington Library Association Board of Directors