

The La Crosse Public Library Board of Trustees recognizes that the City of La Crosse is facing a significant budget deficit and that all City departments must make tough decisions while continuing to serve our citizens. We further understand that the bulk of our municipal operating budget goes to the salaries of our greatest asset, our dedicated employees. As a City department funded through taxpayer dollars, the Library is no exception.

Facing unprecedented budget reductions in 2020, the Library was encouraged to seek long-term solutions when tasked with reducing its budget by \$525,000 over a six-month period. Given the extraordinary circumstances of that period, we tackled this difficult charge and subsequently made the excruciating decision to eliminate 15 of our Librarians, Associates, Assistants, and support staff. Knowing the considerable continued impact this drastic measure would have on library services and programs, we reduced our total FTE count by 11, dropping to 46.08, the lowest staffing level in recent history.

Since 2020, aided partially by ARPA funding, the City's budget allowed a partial restoration of just over half of the 11 FTEs lost. With each reinstated position, the library has incrementally restored services and programs. Library leadership has strategically restructured staffing, ensuring reimplemented positions align with the changing needs of our community. However, the impact of the reduction in force is still being felt by our patrons and our staff. Additional cuts will result in the loss of library positions and further limitations in library services.

While we appreciate the importance of all services municipal employees provide, as well as the seriousness of decisions ahead, we urge City leaders and Common Council to implement a more equalized approach to forthcoming reductions. We make this request as we keep in mind the sizable reductions in library personnel extending beyond the disparate 2020 funding decrease. Over the last thirteen years, the number of library full-time equivalent (FTE) positions has declined by 20%; narrowing from 65.93 FTE in 2010 to 52.75 FTE in 2023.

As our patrons know, the library is first and foremost a service organization. It is our amazing and award-winning staff who make our library the vibrant and essential resource it is. They work tirelessly to provide new services, select and process materials, develop responsive programming, and ensure that our patrons have the information, education, and connection they need. They assist with everything from early literacy development to job searching to collaborations across City departments, local businesses and organizations who serve youth while providing a safe, free, and welcoming community space for our diverse residents and their varied needs within the City of La Crosse.

In light of considerable personnel reductions already absorbed over the course of thirteen years, and in particular, the continued impacts of the disproportionate cut to the library budget in 2020, we respectfully request that departments and services are affected as equitably as possible.

Suzanne Anglehart, Library Board President

On behalf of the La Crosse Public Library Board of Trustees: Kathy Ivey-Vice President, Araysa Simpson-Secretary, Katie Bittner, Ross Seymour, Aaron Engel-School District of La Crosse Designee, Jessica Thill, Mac Kiel-City Council Representative, and Erin Raymus