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February 2, 2021

Lafayette Public Library Board of Control
301 West Congress Street
Lafayette, LA 70501

To the Members of the Library Board of Control:

The robust exchange of ideas and opinions is fundamental to a healthy democracy. Providing free, unfettered access to those ideas and opinions is an essential characteristic of American libraries. Libraries celebrate and preserve our democracy and our civil society by making available the widest possible range of viewpoints, opinions, and ideas, so that all individuals have the opportunity to learn about and engage with the history, politics, and culture of our nation from a variety of perspectives.

As institutions that serve everyone in the community, libraries have a responsibility to present a broad range of diverse viewpoints when they plan and provide programming and resources for the enrichment of their community. There should be no limiting qualifiers on programming or resources based on a speaker's background, and there is no justification for the exclusion of programming deemed to be unpopular or offensive by some in the community, no matter how vocal or influential.

In fulfilling its duty to present programming of interest to the community, the library should offer free access to varying topics and ideas over time, drawing on the library staff's professional expertise and ethical commitments to assure that the library's programs reflect a diversity of viewpoints. Libraries should not ignore or avoid a program or discussion for fear of causing offense or provoking controversy.

For this reason, we write to express our deep concern about the Board of Control's decision to refuse a grant from the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities that would have funded the creation of a program on the history of voting, which would have included a discussion of voter suppression led by highly regarded scholars and authors, on the grounds that such a discussion of historical facts represents a partisan debate.

As an organization that has long promoted the crucial role of libraries in fostering an informed and engaged electorate, we believe that the program proposed by your former director, Theresa Elbertson, would have helped to encourage greater participation in our democratic processes by highlighting the major milestones in the history of voting rights. We strongly encourage you to work with the members of the Lafayette community who have expressed concern about your decision and to reconsider your vote to refuse the grant and cancel the program.

In particular, we encourage continued community conversation with the Louisiana NAACP, Stand Black, and the Lafayette League of Women Voters. We believe these conversations will offer the Board of Control and the Lafayette Parish Council an opportunity to ensure that the library's programming and

resources address the needs of the diverse Lafayette community, without regard to partisan complaints, public pressure, or fear of criticism, consistent with the ethical statements issued by the American Library Association and United for Libraries, the Association of Library trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations.

We also encourage you, as part of this process, to review and revise the policies and procedures governing library programming. Specifically, the Lafayette Public Library should adopt policies that ensure staff have the flexibility and means to create programs that represent a full range of viewpoints and serve the interests and information needs of all members of Lafayette's community. The library staff can best accomplish this task if policies adopted by the Lafayette Parish Council and the Library Board of Control serve as broad guidelines that empower the library staff to independently exercise their professional judgment and skills when creating programming for the library.

We urge you to reinstate the conversations on the history of voting rights even without the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. By providing your community with opportunities to engage in conversations with historians and scholars about topics of importance, you will send a powerful message to the public – that history is not a political debate, it is fact.

Sincerely and Respectfully,



Julius C. Jefferson, Jr., President
American Library Association



David Paige, President
United for Libraries