



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“We are deeply disappointed in the Governor’s actions today, particularly in light of the inconsistent message, wherein he funded both of these programs last year in the approximate same amounts that he cut this year...”

-Lobbyists Mike and Christina Dillon, August 24, California Library Association website (cla.org)

California’s 2007-2008 State budget is bad news for public libraries. Two major library programs suffered significant cuts, apparently in an effort to accomplish a budget with zero deficit. In Arnold Schwarzenegger’s words: “I am deleting the discretionary \$1,000,000 legislative augmentation to the Public Library Foundation...In addition, I am deleting \$7,000,000 in order to further build a prudent reserve in light of the various uncertainties in revenues and spending that we face this year.” The Transaction Based Reimbursement program suffered a similar fate, also losing \$7,000,000 and also explained by the same language.

According to the California State Education Code, Title 1, Division 1, Part 11, Chapter 1.5, Articles 1-4, Sections 18010-18030, the PLF provides “direct state aid to California public libraries for basic public library services.” The goal of this fund is to “embody the state’s interest in the general diffusion of

information and knowledge through free public libraries; encourage lifelong learning; supplement the system of free public education; help libraries serve as sources of information and inspiration to persons of all ages, cultural backgrounds and economic status; and furnish a resource for continuing education.” In other words, this fund was designed to support what public libraries have always done and continue to try to do.

The amount provided by the PLF has varied greatly over the last two decades. Based on a per capita cost each year, the law permits the Legislature to appropriate up to 10% of a target level of service. Full funding of the target amount has never been reached and has gone from \$8.8 million in 1992/1993 (19% of full funding) to \$56.8 million in 2000/2001 (79% of full funding). The new amount for this fiscal year brings it back to about 17% of full funding, instead of the

approximately 26% it would have been if left alone.

I love that the Education Code is used to describe this fund, since it puts into law the idea that libraries contribute to the ongoing education of those they serve. To cut money from institutions that have proven to consistently make our society a better place is shortsighted and certainly could make voters question the support for education in this state.

In addition, there are the cuts to the TBR. According to the State Library website, the TBR program “reimburses local libraries for a portion of the costs they incur when they extend lending services beyond their normal clientele.” Included in this are equal access and universal borrowing – the reason you can use almost any California public library without paying out of jurisdiction fees; and, interlibrary loan – which allows for borrowing

materials from another library’s collection. Both of these help communities by making library materials available, no matter the budget or collection of the local library. These ideas come out of the truly democratic beliefs of public libraries – that most of all, libraries are working together to lessen the inequalities of society by providing free access to information. The more we are able to do this, the more educated and well informed we can be as a society.

CLA lobbyists Mike and Christina Dillon have asked California public librarians to share examples of how these cuts will affect their libraries. I encourage any readers to let your state representatives or the CLA know how your library will be affected. We can all hope future budgets will better reflect the education and information needs of California communities.