

20 July 2021

Ms. Mariana Moore, Chair, Measure X Community Advisory Board
c/o Lisa Driscoll, Contra Costa County Finance Director

I am writing to endorse the Contra Costa County Librarian's appeal to the Measure X Community Advisory Board to allocate funding that will provide enhanced stability and equity to our county's residents. Support for the library system's initiative would signal a firm commitment to fulfilling the county's equity goals, across multiple sectors, and to prioritizing inclusion as a principle of community organization.

I applied for and was appointed as District 1 Library Commissioner by Supervisor Gioia due to my passion for prioritizing the needs of our underserved community members. Measure X provides an important opportunity to enact that mission.

The Contra Costa County Library's per capita operating income falls woefully short of the median for libraries statewide, and particularly that of other Bay Area county libraries. Our system receives funding equivalent to 1.5% of 1% of property tax for all properties (aside from those in the city of Richmond, which operates its own library system). This amount accounts for just .97% of the county's current budget. Currently, the cost of additional operational hours beyond the county-funded minimum threshold is borne by cities, as is facilities maintenance. While *some* of our county's cities and their libraries' respective friends' groups and foundations can pitch in substantively to fill in the opportunity and equity gaps produced by this scant level of support—in services, programming, open hours, facilities maintenance, etc.—many others simply cannot. This also applies to libraries in unincorporated areas, such as El Sobrante, Kensington (both within District 1), and Bay Point (located in District 5) that do not have a potential city funding base from which to draw. The resulting picture is wildly disparate. To illustrate this point, the four cities with the greatest number of city-funded library hours at present are those with the highest household income. During a recent county needs assessment, one community member put this blunt reality in stark perspective: *"Fix your system. The libraries in the different communities could not be a more blatant illustration of the divide between 'haves and have-nots' in this county. Poor kids see that what the county thinks they deserve are understaffed libraries and ratty books, libraries that are closed more than they're opened. Rich neighborhoods meanwhile get the best of the best. Is that what libraries are supposed to be about?"*

In other words, the current funding model and allocation reflects, contributes to, and even exacerbates our county's inequities. ***We can and we must do better.***

The existing state of our county's library funding does not serve all community members, and it certainly does not serve them all equally. The significant revenue expected from the Measure X initiative has the potential to level the playing field for our various branches and to infuse our library system's delivery of equitable services and contributions to impactful outcomes with real backbone. It would directly support facility upgrades (which are desperately needed in many of the libraries located in impacted communities), staffing, collection development, and operational support. Specifically, the measure could enact the following: funding for across-the-board 56 hour open hours at ***all*** branches, improved facilities, increased collections, additional services, more outreach opportunities, safe spaces for teens to congregate after school, and better wraparound support for families and residents, particularly in underserved communities.

We are undoubtedly experiencing a widening gap between the have's and the have-not's, particularly in the Bay Area. County Librarian McKee's Measure X proposal can ameliorate some of the impacts of that trend. There are so many forces that are beyond the control of local municipalities. ***This is not one of them.*** Measure X provides a direct portal to greater equity and excellent services for ***all*** of our county's residents. The measure is not directly tied to nor a result of our state's unprecedented 2021 budget surplus, but it is certainly part of the larger picture: an opportunity to address and ***redress*** some of the massive disparities—both their causes and effects—in our region's healthcare, education, housing, public safety, economic, and environmental sectors, among others.

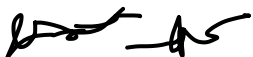
In November 2020, Contra Costa County voters passed Measure X to fund essential services including the regional hospital, community health centers, emergency response, safety-net services, early childhood services, and other community services. The County Librarian's request is fully consistent with the purposes of Measure X, especially the following key targets:

- Support crucial safety-net services
- Invest in early childhood services
- Protect vulnerable populations
- Fund other essential services

Our public libraries are the institutions where ideals like equal and free access acquire animus and meaning and where a region's diversity can be truly reflected and enacted. They are one of the most vital spaces of civic involvement and intellectual freedom in a democratic state. But they have increasingly become part of the social safety net for many populations, especially our most vulnerable community members. There is no doubt that we need more vigorous and inclusive community services, and there is no doubt that this funding boost can help make that happen. Measure X funds are explicitly targeted to address these prevailing social issues.

Please endorse our County Librarian's request for Measure X allocation. Thank you for your consideration.

Warmly,



Rachel Rosekind, PhD
Contra Costa County Library District 1 Commissioner

Cc: Supervisor John Gioia