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ALA American Library Association

August 8, 2017

Members of the City Council, City of Escondido
201 North Broadway
Escondido, CA 92025

Board of Trustees, Escondido Public Library
239 S. Kalmia Street
Escondido, CA 92025

Dear Mayor Abed, City Council Members, President Guiles, and Trustees:

As presidents of the American Library Association (ALA) and Public Library Association (PLA), we are writing to express our full support of the Escondido Public Library and we urge you to dismiss efforts to privatize this vital community asset.

In 2001, the American Library Association adopted the following policy:

ALA affirms that publicly funded libraries should remain directly accountable to the public they serve. Therefore, the ALA opposes the shifting of policymaking and management oversight of library services for the public to the private for-profit sector.

Democracy depends on a well-informed and well-educated society in order to be self-governing. Public libraries provide access to an infinite array of ideas both present and past, our global and local history, our literary heritage, and learning resources for people of all ages. Today, access to 21st-century technologies is critical for global networking, information access, and the routine tasks of individual commerce. Professional staff and appointed trustees implement policies and practices that guarantee patron privacy and access for all, without regards to means or background.

Privatizing a public service such as the library threatens two pillars of public control—accountability and transparency—and undermines public trust. Library staff and trustees, as public employees and appointees, are accountable to their fellow community members and they ensure transparency through open meetings, a publicly presented budget and shared decision making. Policies are approved in the public view and with opportunity for input. A private company is accountable to its investors and typically does not disclose its budget; therefore, a community will not know how its taxpayer dollars are spent.

A move to a privately-operated library may also jeopardize Escondido's ability to raise money for the library from sources such as grants, donations, and gifts. A for-profit entity may not be eligible to participate in the same resource sharing programs that the public library offers. Moreover, Escondido Public Library has deeply rooted connections to the community through its staff, trustees, friends groups, and volunteers. A shift away from a public service, non-profit focus to a privately-run, for-profit

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model will diminish these critical structures and connections that are the very heart of the Escondido Public Library, the city's most widely used public service.

As association leaders who have had the privilege of visiting public libraries across the country, we know that no two libraries are alike, but that successful libraries share something in common: a deep commitment and connection to the communities they serve. The professional staff at Escondido Public Library works with the community to ensure that residents' needs and interests are at the core of their mission and their everyday work. Programs and collections reflect that commitment, from developmentally-aligned early literacy activities and programs for job seekers, to the bilingual book club and stewardship of Escondido's local history via its Pioneer Room. Thoughtful material selection reflects understanding of a diverse and growing community with unique needs, interests, and aspirations.

We recognize that the residents of Escondido have waited years for a new library facility that will provide additional meeting rooms, more space for programming and collections, and upgraded technology. We also know that, when funding is secured, the best team to successfully manage the transition from the current space to a new facility is one that is obligated to its community, not to shareholders or a remote corporate office.

At ALA and PLA, we vigorously support libraries that are answerable to the people they serve. We believe that the Escondido Public Library has demonstrated its commitment and value to the community, and we believe that maintaining a transparent, locally- and publicly-governed library is the best path forward for current and future residents of Escondido.

Sincerely,



James G. Neal, President
American Library Association



Pam Sandlian Smith, President
Public Library Association

cc: Jeffrey R. Epp, City Manager
Helen McAlary, President, California Library Association