

Library Board,

Library Board President, Sheila Biggs, and I have conferred and based on the recommendation of the Association of Rural and Small Libraries and the American Library Association as well as the majority of libraries in our state (and the US) we have decided to temporarily shut down the library after close of business on Thursday, March 19th. At this time we cannot keep up with the recommended disinfecting of library materials and surfaces and this puts not only the community at risk but the staff as well. We hope to be able to reopen on April 1st most likely with a plan and procedures in place to limit access to the library building while still being able to provide materials and printing services and possibly limited computer services.

Many Abilene Businesses are limiting access to their interior spaces and we hope to develop a plan for curbside service if prudent. Part of the School District's plan for continuing education outside of the school buildings is to provide access for students without computers and internet. If the school district needs our help with this issue in the future we will assist in any way feasible.

I believe our library policy as provided below supports this:

G. Unexpected Closings

The Library's most valuable assets are its staff and patrons. There may arise unexpected occasions when the Library would have to close, particularly those occasions that would place the Library's staff or patrons in harms way. Should inclement weather occur, a biological or chemical threat, or other unforeseen emergency, the Library will be closed.

If there are other issues, the director will determine if the library should close. If the director is not available, the associate director will decide appropriate action. If the associate director is not available, the chairman of the Board of Trustees will make the decisions. No time will be deducted from the regularly scheduled employee's leave because of an unexpected closing.

Below is today's statement from the Association of Rural and Small Libraries.

*Dear library leaders and governing bodies,
The Board of Directors for the national Association for Rural and Small Libraries [ARSL] supports the safety and well-being of library workers and the small and rural communities we serve. In order to best protect library workers and our communities from exposure to COVID-19, we strongly recommend that small and rural libraries, their trustees, and their governing bodies consider closing library buildings to the public and only reopen when guidance from public health officials indicates the risk from COVID-19 has significantly subsided.*

This is a difficult recommendation to put forth as we recognize that in some cases, small and rural libraries are the only means for residents to access government and utility resources in their respective communities. Service and stewardship to our communities are core to our profession, and many small and rural libraries have advocated hard for funding for these services for that very reason. We are often the only institutions to remain open during times of crisis.

Regardless, the health of library workers and the communities we serve is of utmost importance. Libraries are, by design, unable to practice social distancing and disinfecting to the degree recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other health authorities. Keeping libraries open at this time has the potential to harm our communities far more than help. By closing libraries, we understand that lives may be saved.

Although closing a library may be a local decision, we urge library administrators, boards, and governments to close library facilities until such time as library workers and visitors are no longer at risk of contracting or spreading the COVID-19 coronavirus. Additionally, and in alignment with the American Library Association's Allied Professional Association, we encourage libraries to ensure that all library workers receive paid leave, including health coverage, while libraries are closed.

ARSL Board members are facing many of the same challenges and difficult decisions for our libraries that you are facing for yours. Our organization remains committed to supporting library workers and the communities we serve during these uncertain times.

Sincerely,

ARSL Board of Directors

Please let me know if you have questions or concerns. I appreciate your support during this difficult time.

Wendy
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