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Mr. James W. Kitchens, Jr.  
Councilmember, City of Mary Esther  
195 Christobol Road N  
Mary Esther, FL 32569

August 7, 2017

Dear Councilman Kitchens,

The Florida Library Association (FLA) has learned that the City of Mary Esther is considering defunding their public library. I am writing to urge you to carefully consider the tremendous value the library provides to the residents of Mary Esther.

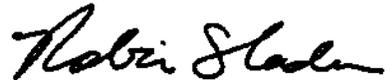
Libraries are good for the economy. A 2013 Taxpayer Return on Investment Study conducted by the Haas Center for Business Research and Economic Development, at the University of West Florida, revealed that for every dollar spent on libraries in Florida, the community gets back more than \$10 in return. Libraries support small businesses by providing access to research data and by providing computer skills training to the local workforce. Most jobs now require an applicant to apply online. Libraries provide computers with internet access, and staff who can assist a person in creating an email account, writing a resume, and completing an online application. Many people still do not have access to computers with internet access in the home. There are also many job seekers who are changing careers who have never needed to obtain an email account or apply for jobs online. Library staff members are ready to help.

Libraries support educational achievement. Libraries are a vital element in the educational infrastructure of any community. The Mary Esther Public Library offers early literacy classes to prepare children to be successful in school, access to computers and the internet for students researching projects or writing papers, 24 hour access (from home) to online homework help resources and downloadable books, and opportunities to learn about and use emerging technologies. Access to new technology, such as virtual reality hardware and software available at the Mary Esther Public Library, allows all members of the community to experience this new technology and helps inspire young people to pursue science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) subjects in school. STEM fields offer high paying jobs, and libraries want to provide educational experiences that give every child the opportunity to obtain these jobs if desired.

Libraries offer lifelong learning opportunities for everyone. Librarians are available to help anyone of any age who has an information question, whether it be a recommendation for a good book to read, assistance in learning about a health concern, or help using Facebook in order to see photographs of a grandchild. Libraries provide a place for the community to gather and a place to create and discover. The library offers book clubs, movie matinees, online language learning software, video games that can be borrowed, and so much more. The library is an active community center, with trained staff available to assist anyone who asks; and a center for discovery that can educate and inspire all who choose to visit.

The Mary Esther Public Library is well used. Closing the library will have a negative impact on thousands of current residents. Where else are these services provided at no additional cost to the residents of Mary Esther? FLA urges community leaders to find other options for closing the budget gap. Your library is too valuable to lose.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin Shader". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robin Shader, MLS  
President, Florida Library Association