



Michigan Library Association | 3410 Belle Chase Way, Suite 100 | Lansing, MI 48911
Phone: (517) 394-2774 | www.milibraries.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President

Kristin Shelley
East Lansing Public Library

President-Elect

Julia Eisenstein
Univ. of Detroit Mercy Library

Past President

Steven Bowers
Wayne State University Library

Secretary/Treasurer

Richard Schneider
Fremont Public Library

Jessica Anne Bratt
Grand Rapids Public Library

Pamela Christensen
Marquette

Jennifer Dean
Univ. of Detroit Mercy Library

Scott Duimstra
Capital Area District Library

Mollie Freier
Lydia Olson Library, NMU

Karen Knox
Orion Township Public Library

Deborah E. Mikula
Michigan Library Association

Kelly Richards
Muskegon Area District Library

Randy Riley
Library of Michigan

Cathleen Russ
Troy Public Library

Ryan Wieber
Kalamazoo Public Library

Executive Director

Deborah E. Mikula

April 23, 2020

Johns Hopkins
Center for Health Security
621 E. Pratt Street, Suite 210
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Members of the Johns Hopkins Research Team,

The Michigan Library Association has reviewed the “Public Health Principles for a Phased Reopening During COVID-19 Guidance for Governors” report and we believe that your assessment of low contact, low risk for our nation’s libraries needs to be immediately reassessed. It is this type of misrepresentation in analyzing true and real circumstances in our public, academic, and school libraries that will cause great harm and will continue the spread of COVID-19 to our patrons and library staff members if not updated immediately.

The Michigan Library Association (MLA) was formed in 1891 and has refined our mission over the years to lead the advancement of all libraries through advocacy, education and engagement. We represent 1700 members throughout Michigan and each of them looks to us for guidance in determining high quality best practices.

MLA advocated early and often to Michigan’s Governor Gretchen Whitmer to close all libraries, recognizing that when our K-12 schools were ordered closed, that libraries would be inundated with patrons. We are proud to say that many other states adopted MLA’s communications and advocated for libraries to close.

When the Governor releases us to reopen our doors, we want to be ready. We want to make sure that our reopening plans are in place and that we have thought of every contingency for keeping our patrons and staff safe from a resurgence of the coronavirus. We recognize that our services and workflow will need to change; that our cleaning will need to be performed more often and with deeper, longer-lasting techniques; that our staff will need access to PPE and to explore new ways to serve patrons in a way that is safe for both; and that we need to prepare for differing patron behaviors in light of the coronavirus including updating all of our existing room and use policies. We will be ready when the time comes to reopen our doors.

What you have missed in your analysis, however, is that libraries are vibrant and robust places to gather socially. They are not quiet spaces, low contact or low risk as you have alluded. While they are still places to find a book or two within the stacks, over the years, they have turned into the heart and soul of their communities. Many, if not all, serve more like community centers having expanded their programming and their spaces to accommodate the myriad needs within their community.

The Michigan Library Association President, Kristin Shelley summed it up this way:

As a public library director in a university town, I am concerned and dismayed about the Johns Hopkins reopening report that characterizes libraries as low risk for transmitting COVID-19. Libraries are community gathering spaces, especially in times of an economic downturn. We provide services from large and small meeting rooms, programming for all age levels, free wi-fi, free computer access, copiers, technology trainings, readers' advisory, and space for community members to connect with books and with each other. On an average day we easily see upwards of 1,000 visitors in a public space that is just over 20,000 square feet. There is a tremendous amount of interaction with patrons as we provide exceptional, personalized customer service. Our programs cater to all ages—storytimes can easily bring in 50 plus children and caregivers three times per week. In short, libraries are very busy public entities that welcome all members of the community through our doors and into our buildings. We are not low risk for COVID-19 transmittal.

To help set the record straight, we have included normal **everyday** photographs from a number of libraries throughout Michigan to highlight our points. While we agree to the premise of the phased in approach you have suggested, we vehemently disagree with how you have characterized libraries as low risk, low contact. We request that you reassess and correct your findings so that our Governors, municipal leaders and others who will likely take this study verbatim and use it to execute reopening strategies are not misinformed about the nature of library patron behaviors.

Sincerely,



Deborah E. Mikula
Executive Director

CC: Caitlin Rivers, PhD, MPH Senior Scholar, Assistant Professor
Elena Martin, MPH Analyst, Research Associate
Crystal Watson, DrPH, MPH Senior Scholar, Assistant Professor
Monica Schoch-Spana, PhD Senior Scholar, Senior Scientist
Lucia Mullen, MPH Analyst, Research Associate
Tara Kirk Sell, PhD, MA, Senior Scholar, Assistant Professor
Scott Gottlieb, MD Resident Fellow, American Enterprise Institute
Kelsey Lane Warmbrod, MS, MPH Analyst, Research Associate
Divya Hosangadi, MSPH Analyst, Research Associate
Amanda Kobokovich, MPH Analyst, Research Associate
Christina Potter, MSPH Analyst, Research Associate
Anita Cicero, JD Deputy Director, Visiting Faculty
Tom Inglesby, MD Director, Professor



Photograph from the University of Detroit Mercy library. This photo shows a typical day for students who use the library.



East Lansing Public Library – “Bubble Boy” family program. These programs happen 4-5 times a week in the community room, all year long.