



On Monday, March 15 the New Jersey Library Association posted a statement urging that all libraries be closed immediately. We forwarded that statement to officials in Governor Murphy's office. They asked us how many libraries were still open. Today, we posted this question on the NJLA Facebook page. We were extremely disturbed to learn that although most libraries were closed to the public, library staff were still required to report to work or take sick time. Thank you for all your responses. Below is the message sent by NJLA to Governor Murphy's office this afternoon (March 17) at 4:00 pm.

All Public and Academic Libraries in New Jersey must be closed to the Public and to Staff Immediately

At your request, the New Jersey Library Association sought to determine how many libraries were still open to the public. Since this morning, we have received at least thirty replies to a Facebook request for that information on our NJLA FB page. Most public libraries are now reporting that they are closed. However, we were deeply distressed to discover that staff still must report to many buildings or use their paid time off. This is very troubling to us, since it is even happening in libraries in communities suffering the most effects of COVID-19. Fair Lawn in Bergen County and Old Bridge in Middlesex County are just two examples of that. The use of social distancing is often impossible in a small workspace such as a library building, and more importantly, difficult to enforce among staff members.

Libraries are public buildings, which receive hundreds of visitors a week. While we applaud the closing of libraries to protect the public, we are extremely concerned about the health of library employees who are still required to report to work. These employees may have unknowingly been exposed to the virus on numerous occasions. Since it has been determined that it can take up to two weeks before symptoms of the virus can appear, we believe all of these workers should be required to stay home as a precautionary step to protect the health of other staff members and the community. This is the procedure which is being followed in school districts. In addition, library staff (full or part-time) should not be required to use sick or personal time because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

All public libraries should remain closed to the public and to the staff until the health crisis has "flattened out" as Governor Murphy recommends. Self-quarantining seems by far the most efficacious way to accomplish that goal.

We are also hearing that many academic libraries are also still open (for example, Rider University and Montclair University). These facilities have also had hundreds of visitors in the past few months. We believe the same precautions must also be used for academic libraries. The facilities must be closed and all staff should remain at home until the crisis passes. COVID-19 is an unfortunate and unanticipated situation and library staff should not be required to use personal or sick time, especially since self-quarantining is the most effective way to flatten the curve.

Our library staffs are providing tremendous services virtually during this challenging time. Just doing that, they are hoping to act in the best way to serve the people of New Jersey; flatten the curve, but address the perils of social isolation that some people may be prone to during self-quarantining. The New Jersey Library Association is currently collecting stories of how our libraries (both public and academic) are continuing to serve the public. Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions or suggestions. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jen Schureman Brenner, President, New Jersey Library Association

Pat Tumulty, Executive Director, New Jersey Library Association