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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY MEMORIAL LIBRARY SYSTEM

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Hyattsville – On a wintery Saturday afternoon in December, the Prince George's County Branch Library in the Accokeek community was a warm, welcoming place to visit. In the children's section, vacationing pre-K and elementary children listened attentively to a volunteer read a favorite story; near the rows of computers at the Greenbelt Branch, three middle school and high school boys – the first generation in their family to attend middle or high school - plowed through holiday homework and accessed the Internet for various assignments and projects; at the Fairmont Heights Branch, senior citizens read periodicals and browsed for books, while job seekers fine tuned resumes and searched job sites; and at the Oxon Hill Branch, a 4th grade boy shared reading with friends in the Boys Read Club.

With so many issues pulling for our attention, it is easy to forget that the Prince George's County Memorial Library System is a crucial part of our community's economic and social fabric. Over the past four years, during a time of great economic hardship in our community, our library system registered a nearly 11 percent increase in visits per capita. In 2011 alone, Prince George's County libraries were visited 4.5 million times.

This year, for the fourth time in as many years, the Prince George's County Memorial Library System Board of Trustees was instructed by county budget officials to submit a flat budget along with one that shows an additional 5 percent decrease in funding. Since 2008, our library system has seen its funding reduced by nearly 17 percent resulting in reduced weekly library operating hours and the elimination of Sunday opening hours.

As we reduced our library operating hours, we also reduced crucial early learning programs for our children and cut the budget for books and materials - the heart and soul of our system - by more than 20 percent. The result is fewer purchases of important and popular book titles, e-books and picture books, and our customers wait longer for popular reading materials.

Prince George's County libraries are essential for the future of our county. Every day we change lives - from building literacy skills at storytimes to providing in-depth resources and workshops

for job seekers. We are bridging the digital divide with public access computers and are the great educational equalizer in our society.

We, the Prince George's County Library Board, take our fiduciary responsibilities seriously and work to ensure that our county library system is lean, trim, and meets our customers' needs. But, after four years of reductions, there is no more room to cut. Prince George's County libraries are an essential part of our county. High unemployment and the recession result in a higher demand for public library services, and Prince George's county residents need to know that our library system is operating with too few resources to meet the higher demands of our communities.

As we hold our Board meetings at various libraries throughout our county, we have heard you say, "No More Cuts to Libraries." We need you to stand with us and your fellow supporters of your neighborhood library to say: "We want a vibrant, strong, library system that will continue to meet the needs of the community." The Board of Trustees will continue to advocate for the library each and every day, and we hope you join us in expressing our combined request to fully fund the library system. Without you, our request may go unheeded and our beloved libraries will suffer the consequences of further cuts.

County Executive Rushern Baker has scheduled three public hearings on the 2013 proposed budget. We encourage you to attend and to advocate on behalf of our libraries:

Thursday, January 26, 2012, 7 pm – Laurel High School

Wednesday, February 1, 2012, 7 pm – Harmony Hall

Tuesday, February 7, 2012, 7 pm – Prince George's Community College – Rennie Forum

Please make sure that our County's elected officials continue to support our public libraries as the vital community hubs that they are. It is critically important that communities be involved in helping shape Library services, now and for the next generation.

Sincerely,

Prince George's County
Memorial Library System
Board of Library Trustees

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