

Statement on the failed Tax Board of Control President Allan Moore

Good evening. Before we continue with tonight's regular business, I want to address Saturday's election results directly and clearly.

The voters of Lafayette Parish have spoken. Fifty-six percent of them said no to the renewal of the library's 3.12-mill property tax. We hear them. We take that result seriously, and we respect the democratic process that produced it.

Saturday's ballot was a hard one statewide. All five state constitutional amendments also failed, several by overwhelming margins. Voters across Louisiana walked into the polls carrying real and legitimate questions about how government handles public money. We are not going to use that broader context as an excuse. The question voters have asked of us, and have every right to ask, is a simple one. Are we getting our money's worth? It's the responsibility of this Board, and of Director Gillane and his administration team, to answer that question clearly, transparently, and with evidence!

I want to begin that answer by saying plainly what this library is.

This library reflects the values of Lafayette Parish. Our collection, our programming, and our policies are shaped by the families, the students, the seniors, and the educators who use this system. The programs on our calendar are the programs our community engage with. Story times for young children. Reading programs for students. Job search resources and computer access. Genealogy and Louisiana history for our seniors. Maker spaces for teenagers building real skills with their hands. Free meeting rooms for civic groups, small businesses, study groups, and ministries. We are not a library that chases the latest trends and headlines. We are a library that serves Lafayette Parish.

Now, let me share the rest of the answer, with facts.

In 2019, this library system was operating at a \$1.5 million deficit. In 2024, after several years of disciplined decisions by previous Boards and the current administration, we closed the year with a \$3.6 million surplus. We did that while reducing our staff. We did that while increasing programs, increasing visits, and beginning major capital investments. The South Regional renovation. The North Regional renovation and expansion. Elevator modernization at the Main Library. The design of the new Northeast Regional Library on the Holy Rosary campus.

In 2025 alone, this system experienced 746,000 visits to our 10 locations, nearly three visits for every man, woman, and child in Lafayette Parish. We circulated 1.5 million items. We hosted 3,830 free programs attended by more than 80,000 people. We facilitated over 35,000 free meeting and study room reservations. We hold more than 55,000 active student library cards via their school ID across our K thru 12th grade schools, ULL, and SoLACC.

We deliver all of that on a median average of less than \$4 per Lafayette parish homeowner per month...and for homes valued at \$75,000 or less, it cost nothing at all.

This is a strong return on investment by any reasonable measure of public services offered. The library, which provides what our families and children and seniors and students actually want and use, and it costs the median homeowner less per month than a single latte at your favorite coffee spot. That is the value proposition. Our job is to make sure every citizen of Lafayette Parish knows it.

I also want to take a moment to speak to something deeper than dollars and cents, because the case for the public library has never just been an economic one.

We are living through an era in which loneliness, isolation, and time lost to screens have been formally recognized as a public health concern in this country according to The Surgeon General. The data is sobering, and the communities feeling it most acutely look a lot like ours.

The public library is one of the last places left in American life where a person can walk through the door, sit down, and be welcomed....no purchase, no subscription, no algorithm deciding what they see. Where a child can sit on a rug at story time. Where a teenager can build something real with their hands on a Saturday afternoon in our amazing makers space. Where a senior can find comfortable chair, a familiar face, and a warm conversation. Where neighbors end up in the same room with each other. The 80,000 program attendees and 35,000 meeting-room bookings we counted last year represent something a smartphone, tablet or computer has never been able to provide. Lafayette Parish neighbors, in person, interacting to continue the wonderful heritage Lafayette parish is known for; great people!

That is also part of what less than \$4 a month per resident is providing in this parish.

This millage remains on the books through December 31, 2026. Under Louisiana law, the Library has one more opportunity, this December 2026, to ask the voters to keep this funding in place....notice I said in place...not an additional tax. We fully intend to use that opportunity.

Between now and then, this Board and the Library administration have a responsibility, and an opportunity, to communicate the value of this institution more clearly than we ever have before. That means showing up in every corner of this parish, in places where we won on Saturday and in places where we did not. It means putting our numbers, our programs, and our spending in front of any citizen who wants to see them. It means listening to what our neighbors are telling us about what they need from their library, and showing them what their library already is and offers freely to them.

To the more than 16,750 voters who stood with the library on Saturday, thank you. And to the ones who pushed through our doors nearly 750,000 times across 10 locations this past year, I want to ask something of you. Tell someone. Tell a friend, a coworker, a neighbor, the person beside you at church on Sunday. Tell them what this library did for your child, your niece or nephew, or your parent, or you. The strongest case for this institution will not be made by this Board or administration between now and December. It will be made by the citizens of this wonderful parish who already know what their library is worth and means to them.

And do not stop there. Call your favorite local news station. Call the radio program you listen to on your drive in. Tell them what this library means to your family. Share your story on social media, on whatever platform you spend your time on, and come to our library's pages and share it there too. We want to hear it, and we want your neighbors to hear it. Every story, every memory, every quiet moment this library gave you or your child or your parent, those are the things that move people. Numbers from a Board podium have their place...but can not communicate the most important value; your voice does.

And to the voters who said no on Saturday, or did not vote at all, we want to hear from you. Tell us what concerned you. Tell us what you want this library to be, or what you believe it should not be. Pick up the phone and call our office at 337-261-5781. Send an email to directorsoffice@lafayettepubliclibrary.org. Come to a Board meeting. The concerns we can address, we will. The questions we can answer, we will answer. This conversation does not end with Saturday's vote....As far as we are concerned, it is just beginning.

This library belongs to every citizen of Lafayette Parish, whether you walk into one of our branches every week or have not been inside one for some time. It reflects this community. It serves this community. It is one of the better investments this parish makes, and it is the duty of this Board and administration to make sure every citizen of Lafayette Parish has the chance to see that for themselves.

Thank you.