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## **American Library Association recommends libraries leave WiFi open during closures while continuing to follow any applicable local, state and federal health and safety guidelines**

For Immediate Release

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CHICAGO — The American Library Association (ALA) Executive Board released the following recommendation to libraries during the COVID-19 Pandemic:

"Our current crisis demands extraordinary measures. As most states and the federal government declare states of emergency, we appreciate that libraries and other public facilities have closed (<http://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2020/03/ala-executive-board-recommends-closing-libraries-public>) temporarily to support critical social distancing efforts. Our top priority and concern is the health and safety of our library staff and the diverse communities we serve.

"As we stated last week, service and stewardship to our communities are core to the library profession. We continue to see this every day even as library buildings close to the public but often sustain or grow their virtual services and resources freely available to all.

"But we also are painfully aware that America's 16,557 public library locations are essential nodes in our nation's digital safety net—connecting people with no-fee access to computers and the internet, lending internet hotspots and devices, and providing digital literacy training and expansive learning and enrichment digital collections for all ages. The COVID-19 Pandemic is disrupting this safety net and spotlighting the persistent digital gaps for more than 20 million people in the United States, including millions of school-age children and college students forced out of classrooms and many more workers also displaced.

"Libraries can and should leave their WiFi networks on even when their buildings are closed wherever possible. As we have noted (<https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/1031927669976/ALA%20Covid-19%20letter%2003192020.pdf>) to the Federal Communications Commission, the ALA believes a 2010 Order from the Commission permits this use without jeopardizing E-rate funding that many public libraries and schools rely on to sustain and build their broadband capacity. In these unprecedented times, we should take whatever steps we can to leverage our resources to maximize benefit to our communities—particularly for those with the fewest resources.

"ALA has long been at the forefront of promoting broadband equity for all and continues to work in coalition (<https://www.shlb.org/uploads/Policy/Additional%20Policy/SHLB%20Covid-19%20FCC%20Letter%20-%20Final.pdf>) to expand the capacity of libraries, schools, colleges and

universities and other community anchor institutions to strengthen our digital networks. We will continue to advocate for digital inclusion for all today and in the future.”

March 25 UPDATE: On Monday, the FCC issued a [public notice \(https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-20-324A1.pdf\)](https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-20-324A1.pdf) confirming community use of E-rate supported Wi-Fi networks. ALA joins FCC in noting that health and well-being are paramount and advises that libraries and their patrons continue to follow any applicable local, state and federal health and safety guidelines, including those regarding shelter in place and social distancing.

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