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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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State Librarians Ask for Reconsideration of “Digital Public Library of America”

Chief Officers of State Library Agencies Concerned That the Name Will Result in Unintended Consequences

Washington, DC - At their recent meeting in Washington, DC, the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA), passed a resolution asking the Steering Committee of the Digital Public Library of America Project, based at Harvard University, to reconsider the name of their project.

State librarians are concerned that calling the national digital library that is envisioned by the Steering Committee the “Digital Public Library of America” might have the unintended consequence of undermining support for public libraries in their states.

“COSLA supports this project, and we want to contribute to its success, but the name of the project plays into the hands of those who erroneously think our public libraries are becoming obsolete,” said COSLA President Lamar Veatch, the State Librarian of Georgia.

COSLA is represented on the Steering Committee by Peggy Rudd, the Texas State Librarian, who will carry COSLA’s message that the name needs another look. “The use of our public libraries in Texas and in every state is at an all-time high,” said Rudd. “But there are some who may believe that a national digital library could somehow replace the 16,000 public libraries in our states.” Rudd will ask the Steering Committee to consider a new name for the project that will not inadvertently provide ammunition to anyone seeking to reduce support for local public libraries.

In passing the resolution COSLA members expressed support for a national digital library that would complement the services of libraries in their states. State librarians see an opportunity through a national digital library to give all citizens in their states improved access to the millions of books and other library materials that are in the public domain and out-of-print, so that public libraries could concentrate their limited resources on in-print books and other recent, high-demand materials.

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Resolution of Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA) Adopted May 11, 2011

Whereas, public libraries in U.S. states, territories and the District of Columbia that are served by the state library agencies are facing unprecedented challenges to their funding — this at a time when public library use is at the highest levels ever recorded, and;

Whereas, public libraries have been challenged as not being worthy of support, because they are erroneously viewed as not being relevant in an age of expanding access to online information, and;

Whereas, the Berkman Center at Harvard University has convened a distinguished group of representatives from libraries, foundations, publishers, and other interested parties to envision a national digital library that would make the cultural and scientific heritage of our country and the world freely available to all, a laudable goal that COSLA strongly supports, and;

Whereas, this project has taken on the name of “Digital Public Library of America,” and;

Whereas, this name may have the unintended consequence of giving credence to the unfounded belief that public libraries can be replaced in over 16,000 communities in the U.S. by a national digital library;

Therefore be it resolved by the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies that we call upon the Steering Committee of the Digital Public Library of America Project to reconsider the name of the project and adopt a name that would not have the unintended consequence of undermining support for public libraries in the U.S.

For more information about the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies, visit www.cosla.org.

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About COSLA

COSLA is an independent organization of the chief officers of state and territorial agencies designated as the state library administrative agency and responsible for statewide library development. Its purpose is to identify and address issues of common concern and national interest; to further state library agency relationships with federal government and national organizations; and to initiate cooperative action for the improvement of library services to the people of the United States. For more information, visit www.cosla.org.