February 28, 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Contact: Lisa Strand, WLA Executive Director, 608-245-3640, strand@scls.lib.wi.us;

The Wisconsin Library Association opposes the proposed Budget Repair Bill and affirms the collective bargaining rights of public employees.

In times of challenge and rapid change, it is important to examine our traditions to find sources of strength and stability. Governor Scott Walker quoted Wisconsin’s State Constitution recently to remind us of the important Wisconsin tradition of “frugality.” There is another Wisconsin tradition, however, the tradition of “fairness,” that also needs to be taken into account.

The concept of fairness, like frugality, has had a long history of bipartisan support in this state. Wisconsin has supported fairness through protecting the rights of workers, requiring open and ethical government practice, and supporting strong institutions of public education to help everyone fully participate in our state’s economic and social life.

Wisconsin’s school, technical college, university, and community libraries have supported the values of both frugality and fairness throughout the long histories of these institutions. Libraries help us save money by providing a means to share library materials, databases, equipment such as computers, and visiting authors and performers. Sharing these valuable resources as a community costs much less than purchasing them as individuals.

Libraries extend the power of this local sharing through cooperative networks that give the users of local libraries access to the collections of other libraries. Our success in sharing these educational resources is a model of efficiency and frugality. The importance of library service is most evident in difficult economic times like these. Library use has soared during the current recession as fewer people are able to purchase these services on their own.

The ultimate goal of libraries is not frugality, however, but fairness. Extending the critically important opportunity for education to all of our citizens is what libraries are all about and what motivates librarians and library workers to come to work every day. We understand that Wisconsin will not move forward without educated citizens and that real economic and social progress won’t be possible unless all Wisconsinites move forward together as we have done in the past.

The Budget Repair Bill is certainly frugal, but it is also certainly unfair. The bill has been promoted as a means of making the compensation of public employees fair when compared with the private sector. Librarians will be glad to direct legislators to the many studies which prove that
public employee compensation including pensions and health insurance is below compensation for comparable private sector jobs, both nationally and in Wisconsin. Inaccurately portraying public employees as being overpaid is unfair. It is also unfair to include sweeping policy changes in the areas of collective bargaining rights, Medicaid eligibility, and the sale of public assets in an emergency bill designed to strictly limit debate on these important issues.

The Wisconsin Library Association supports the Wisconsin traditions of frugality and fairness. We are proud to stand with those who oppose this unfair legislation.

###