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SAN FRANCISCO
LAW LIBRARY

May 15, 2012

The Honorable Edwin M. Lee, Mayor
The Honorable Members of the Board of Supervisors
Ms. Naomi Kelly, City Administrator

Re: Call for Immediate Action for the San Francisco Law Library

Dear Mayor Lee, Honorable Supervisors, and Ms. Kelly:

The San Francisco Law Library is a non-profit, autonomous agency established by state law that has served San Francisco's legal community, the public, judiciary and government officials for more than 140 years. It was the first county law library in California, a model for the statewide county law library system, and one of the premier public law libraries in the state. It is an essential community resource, whose future is in doubt.

Library operations are funded by civil filing fees. The City and County of San Francisco is required by its Charter and state law to provide quarters sufficient to meet the Law Library's needs; thus the Law Library was housed in City Hall from 1914 until 1995 when City Hall closed for a two year seismic upgrade project. During the retrofit, the Library moved to temporary, insufficient quarters in the Veterans Building, which provided only 25% of the space the Library required. Unexpectedly when City Hall reopened, the Law Library was not moved back to its former quarters, but was informed the City would move it to a permanent location that would meet the Library's needs.

Now 17 years later, the Library remains in the Veterans building, but it must relocate by May 2013 when the building closes. Time is rapidly running out to acquire, outfit, and execute a move to a new property, but no amount of space or location has been identified or committed to by the City. Without immediate action by the City, the Law Library will have to close its doors by May 2013.

In this age of digital media, the Law Library has significantly reduced its space needs by utilizing digital resources, but there are large gaps in Internet sources of legal information. Legal publishers do not provide free access to their databases. There is a great need for print materials which are unavailable elsewhere and to enable access without limitation.

The Law Library continues to provide essential print and electronic resources and services to law firms, large and small, self-represented litigants, small businesses, non-profits, legal services and advocacy organizations, state and local government agencies, and the public. By increasing access to legal information, the Law Library is uniquely able to bring this community at least two irreplaceable benefits. First, no other institution in San Francisco aids legal representation and advocacy in the way the Law Library does. Law firms, individual attorneys, legal advocacy groups, non-profits, and government agencies depend on the Law Library for resources they do not have, cannot obtain elsewhere, and are

not available electronically or without great expense. Firms rely on the Law Library for pro bono resources that are outside firm specialties, and for archival material. The Law Library provides free use of legal databases, which are heavily used by solo and small firm practitioners who do not have the financial resources to acquire them for their practices. Attorneys rely on the expertise of Library reference librarians concerning unfamiliar legal topics and resources of which they are not aware. Law Library services and resources not only help attorneys and firms answer legal questions, but save their clients thousands of dollars per year.

Second, no other institution in San Francisco advances greater access to justice in the way that the Law Library does. The Law Library provides the public help in finding, using and understanding legal information. It serves individuals who need help with every day legal concerns such as City permits, building codes, traffic and parking matters, legal forms, small claims, animal liability, neighbor and landlord tenant issues; and business owners who seek information about licensing, business practices and employment issues that are beyond the scope of their outside counsel budgets.

The Law Library also serves people who are not eligible for pro bono or legal services programs, who have been unable to secure or afford legal counsel, and those who choose to represent themselves. Without the Law Library, the public will have nowhere to turn to conduct its legal affairs. These resources are not available to them anywhere else in San Francisco.

The future of the Law Library deeply concerns the people of San Francisco who participate in the legal system. They rely on the San Francisco Law Library for access to legal information and support the Law Library's mission to provide equal access to justice to all the people of San Francisco.

As an innovative and leading commercial, business, and legal center, San Francisco requires and deserves a comprehensive 21st century public law library.

We, the members of the bar, bar associations, legal advocacy organizations, non-profits, legal services providers, government agencies, the public, and the community whose names and organizations are listed below, support the San Francisco Law Library and believe that it is essential that the Mayor and the Members of the Board of Supervisors take immediate steps to locate and commit to providing permanent library quarters with the amount of space required to house a full-service Law Library to meet the legal information needs of the people of the City and County of San Francisco. The San Francisco Law Library is essential for the preservation of the legal rights of all our citizens, and for the vitality of the legal community.

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Heather D. Volante

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Michael Wall, Senior Attorney
Natural Resources Defense Counsel

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Weems Law Offices
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Law Offices of Liat Weingart
Liat Weingart

Steven A. Weinkauf, Attorney
Human Services Agency
City & County of San Francisco

Weintraub Genshlea Chediak Tobin & Tobin
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Weixel Law Office
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Weyand Law Firm
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Whitaker Communications
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White Law Offices
Lon H. White

Law Offices of Barbara-Ann Williams, PC
Barbara-Ann Williams

Law Offices of Stephen M. Williams
Stephen M. Williams

Wilson l Duval
Michelle T. Duval, Attorney

Winston + Strawn LLP

Law Office of Michael Wolchansky
Michael Wolchansky, Managing Attorney

Law Offices of Joan Wolff
Joan Wolff

Nancy Wong, Attorney

Law Offices of Charles J.S. Woodson
Charles J.S. Woodson

Mark Yates, Associate Professor of Law
Director of Academic Development
Golden Gate University School of Law

Law Offices of Fanya Young
Fanya Young

Law Offices of Terence F. Young
Terence Young

Frank W. Yuen, P.C.
Frank W. Yuen, Attorney

Aimee Jill Zeltzer, Attorney