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OPINION

THE READERS' FORUM

Restore Miami-Dade's library budget to \$64 million

The world has lost a literary giant and activist, but Maya Angelou left us many powerful lessons worth heeding. A victim of sexual abuse as a child, the young Maya consoled herself by reading every book in a local Arkansas school library. As an adult she always felt that if she could find her way to a library in any city, she would be OK. Because libraries had a special place in her heart, in 2010 Dr. Angelou donated her collection of personal papers — including drafts and notes from her most famous work, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, and personal correspondence with people such as Coretta Scott King, Gordon Parks, James Baldwin, and numer-

ous prominent civil rights activists — to The New York Public Library.

She donated everything because she knew age was catching up to her and wanted these important pieces of her life preserved for future generations. There is even a library in Stockton, California that bears her name, but here in Miami-Dade libraries are apparently regarded with lesser esteem. In our community, county government has cut the library budget by more than 50 percent in the last four years, causing reduced operating hours, massive layoffs, a reduction in new titles, and fewer programs for children and the community at large.

Libraries are central to our free society because at the heart of our democracy is free and equal access to information for all, regardless of race, ethnicity, ability, or economic status. Libraries represent an individual's right to acquire knowledge, explore and achieve. Make no mistake — libraries are the great equalizer that we can ill afford to dismantle.

Libraries empower people; enhance our economy; support literacy and lifelong learning; strengthen families; build communities; protect our right to know; and preserve our cultural heritage.

One of the important lessons Dr. Angelou leaves behind is that

our public libraries should be treasured, not torn asunder. Her voice is now silent, but ours is not. We must raise our voices to save our libraries.

Our best tribute to Maya Angelou is to insist that Miami-Dade County Commissioners restore our local library budget to \$64 million to ensure full-time access to libraries in every community; restore and enhance programs for children and families, seniors, and the disabled; increase community outreach; and bring library collections up to date for all of us to enjoy.

— John J. Quick, president, Friends of the Miami-Dade Public Library, Coral Gables