As Ohio’s first free public library founded in 1838, Toledo Lucas County Public Library (TLCPL) has a long tradition of providing equitable access to information and knowledge for neighborhoods throughout Toledo and Lucas County. Still, the Library and the communities we serve inherit generations of systemic inequality built on decades of discrimination based on race, class, and gender. Indeed, the history of American public libraries contains its own chapters where Black people, women, poor and working class people were denied access to libraries. Thankfully, libraries have emerged throughout the 21st century as leaders in dismantling systems of oppression by providing unfettered access to information and resources that have been unevenly distributed for generations. Racism is a public health issue. It is at the core of social determinants of health (education, employment, housing), and much of the Library’s work is dedicated to ensuring our communities have access to the resources they need to be strong, healthy, and whole. It is the job of all library leaders and staff to acknowledge that our work around access and equity is not finished, and we must ensure our actions reflect a substantive, measurable, and honest approach to addressing structural inequality.

As of June 2020, the Toledo Lucas County Public Library will answer this challenge by transitioning the work of the Library’s nearly decade-old Diversity Initiatives Group (DIG) committee to an advisory group on equity, diversity, and inclusion. Building on the important awareness-raising and difference-celebrating work of DIG, this new advisory group will be challenged to analyze the Library’s policies and practices against metrics of access, equity, representation, and inclusion. The group will be composed of a diverse group of Library staff from all corners of the Library. They will ask tough questions and provide feedback and guidance to Library leadership around a broad range of issues including recruiting and hiring, training, collection development, program offerings, technology investment, physical and digital access, and organizational strategy. I know that initiatives like this stand little chance for success without support from organizational leaders, which is why today I am affirming the Executive Leadership Team’s commitment to the essential future work of this group.

This transition follows several years of the Library’s explicit focus on recruiting and retaining a workforce that represents the diversity of the communities we serve. I’m proud that in two years, the Library has recruited a more diverse workforce than the demographics of our community; but we know there is still work to do. Libraries across the country need to acknowledge that until we see diverse representation from frontline staff to administration and leadership ranks, our work is not done. To the contrary, our work in this space will be ongoing, as is our commitment to ensuring that our programs, services, and resources are offered amply and equitably to neighborhoods throughout the county.

Jason Kucsma
Executive Director/Fiscal Officer
Toledo Lucas County Public Library
June 8, 2020