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## Camden, NJ Threatens To Permanently Close Its Libraries

by Frank James

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If any city needs to have public libraries it's Camden, N.J., one of the nation's poorest metropolises.

But officials in the city across the Delaware River from Philadelphia are talking about closing their entire library system, which consists of three branches, due to a lack of money to keep them going.

And library board officials say they aren't bluffing, that they'll really close the libraries by Dec. 31 if they don't come up with additional funding.

So what will they do with all their materials?



*Janessa Guzman, 5, chooses a book at the city's Main Branch library, on Friday, Aug. 6, 2010, in downtown Camden, N.J.*

### From the Philadelphia Inquirer:

All materials in the libraries would be donated, auctioned, stored, or destroyed. That includes 187,000 books, historical documents, artifacts, and electronic equipment. Keeping materials in the shuttered buildings is a fire hazard, officials said, and would make them vulnerable to vandalism and vermin...

... There is little, if any, precedent to permanently closing an entire library system, experts said.

The American Library Association could only cite one other example, the Hood River County Library in Oregon, which closed its one location this summer. A measure on the ballot this fall would create a new model of funding and reopen the library.

"It's tragic," said Audra Caplan, president of the national Public Library Association. "We are the only institution in this country that provides access to information and materials for free, which is huge right now."

There is still hope for library users and employees. City Council must approve the mayor's fiscal year 2011 budget, which contains the reduced library funding. It will be introduced Tuesday. Library board member Frank Fulbrook has suggested that city officials lay off one police officer and one firefighter to save enough money to keep one branch open.

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