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TO: Marathon County Public Library Board of Trustees

FROM: Erica Brewster, Director, Edward U. Demmer Memorial Library, Oneida County, Three Lakes

RE: Proposed move to South Central Library System

It has come to my attention that the MCPL board of trustees is being asked to consider the possibility of moving MCPL's library system affiliation from Wisconsin Valley Library Service to the South Central Library System. It is a healthy exercise for all library boards to consider opportunities that could improve service to their library patrons and communities, but I also ask that for due diligence in this exercise and you consider carefully the impact of such a decision on libraries in the WVLS system that depend on MCPL as a resource library.

The simple truth is that communities north of Highway 29 have smaller populations, smaller tax bases, and are more rural and more difficult to provide resources to than communities in the urbanized regions in the southern parts of the state. State newspapers – Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Wisconsin State Journal – have ceased newsstand deliveries to most communities and are threatening to stop all deliveries north of Wausau. Broadband internet service is spotty and expensive. Yet these communities are no less deserving of access to information.

Twenty-four libraries and three library branches depend on the technical services and librarianship of Wausau library staff. The collection and resources of MCPL as a resource library benefit not only the residents of Marathon County, but those in the six other counties in the WVLS system.

MCPL, without the additional funding support given to develop services to serve as a resource to smaller libraries, would lose opportunities to develop collections and staff. MCPL has the opportunity to take direct advantage of WVLS's system resources including immediate system support from on-site staff, subsidized courier to MCPL's branches, direct access to continuing education including annual scholarships to national conferences, and cost reduction of being at the central meeting site rather than having to travel two hours (as I currently do) to participate in-person at system meetings. MCPL would be left to compete with a much larger pool of libraries for increasingly limited resources in the larger southern part of the state.

By remaining part of the WVLS system, MCPL can increase their role and influence as a flagship library. MCPL has the opportunity, if knowledge and skills and leadership were appropriately applied, to become a nationally-recognized resource library that partners with the in-house library system to create innovative, efficient, and forward-reaching programs and support.

Or, MCPL could leave the WVLS system and become just another library among many that must fight for attention and wait in line for service, potentially reducing the service not only to Marathon county residents, but to library users across the north central part of the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective on this decision as a director of a small WVLS library.