

August 16, 2020

Dear MCPL Library System Task Force and MCPL Board of Trustees:

I am a lifelong resident of Wausau and just retired after a thirty-seven-year career as a School Librarian for the DC Everest School District. As a librarian and a member community, I have always valued the mission of libraries and all that they offer our citizens. What I did not realize, until much later, was the critical role of library systems. As a former member of both the WVLS Board of Trustees and a WVLS Advisory Board I appreciate the role that WVLS plays in facilitating cooperation among its member libraries to keep the entire system strong. I have relied on the collective experience and knowledge of the WVLS staff in my role as a school librarian as well. I am shocked that the members of the Task Force and Board of Trustees would consider leaving the system.

The only reason that I can imagine that this change is even being considered is that MCPL Director Ralph Illick is unhappy with WVLS for some reason. I am wondering if this issue is personal rather than based on what is best for our community. I have always been taught that when you have a problem it is best to go directly to the person or organization that you have the problem with and see if the problem can be solved. Why then, has the MCPL Board turned down the offer of the WVLS Board to talk about service issues? Have service issues been clearly identified and communicated to WVLS in an attempt to solve them? Why hasn't the MCPL Administration done everything it can to work with WVLS before making the major and very unusual decision to withdraw from the system?

I am also wondering if this process has been objective. I would hope that as a Task Force or Board of Trustees member you can point to specific service metrics and data to support leaving the Wisconsin Valley Library Service and joining South Central Library System. WVLS staff and board members live in the area and are in unique position to know what the needs are in this area. South Central Library System staff are in a different part of the state which may make it difficult to share resources and communicate needs. How does MCPL's membership not align with their strategic plan? These are some of the questions that the citizens of Marathon County will have for you.

I do not have to tell you that we are living in unprecedented times. Funding for state and local governments are in real jeopardy because of the economic chaos caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic and it doesn't look like things will be improving for quite some time. This does not seem like the time to make a major decision that will send significant funds out of Marathon County and into Dane County.

I would like to encourage the Task Force and the Board to table any decisions until the economy stabilizes. I would also encourage them to meet with the WVLS staff in a good faith effort to discuss any issues. I appreciate the expertise of the MCPL staff and rely on their services. But I have watched initiatives by other MCPL Directors in the past few decades that have nearly destroyed our library. Is the MCPL Director going to push this decision and then retire to leave others to pick up the pieces? Please do not make this decision at this time. There is no urgency to decide before all of the information has been presented.

Sincerely,

Beth Martin

Retired DC Everest Middle School Librarian

Wausau School Board Member

Citizen of Wausau