

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

My name is Carla Huston and I am the library director of the Jean M. Thomsen Memorial Library in Stetsonville, a small village in rural Taylor County and part of the Medford School District. The library serves the residents of the village, which includes an elementary school that serves about 220 students in grades Pre-K - 4, as well as the outlying townships composed of mainly farm families and Mennonite and Amish communities. We also collaborate with the school, providing materials and outreach that cannot be fulfilled by their elementary library.

Although we are a small library, serving a small service area, we are of vital importance to our community, just as a larger library is to theirs. Consequently, the possibility that we may lose access to the resources provided by a larger library such as Marathon County Public Library, is dismaying. I am prompted to ask how the Wisconsin Valley Library Service has failed in their service to libraries across Marathon County? What services have not been met? If specific failures in service cannot be identified, is this a fact-based decision, or one based on personal motives, and is therefore, a subjective decision rather than an objective one?

The last four months have brought a huge change in how all libraries serve their populations. COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on how we function, the services we can provide, and perhaps, ultimately, our funding. As you are aware, public libraries always need to fight for their budget, and those in government who do not value our community contributions may take this time of decreased circulation and in-house programming as an opportunity to cut funding. Local businesses have also suffered the loss of income and, as a result, are now a less reliable source for donations. What this all comes down to is a conviction that libraries needing to work together and support one another as partners in providing our very best service. And to do this we need access to materials that larger libraries possess. In return, our small collection fills some of the holes that a large library may have with our more eclectic items and additional popular items.

If WVLS is meeting its obligations to MCPL, or if areas of unsatisfactory service have been identified and addressed, I have just one question. Who do you want to be? Libraries are not cold entities of business; we are living, breathing hearts of our communities. We embrace inclusion, and as people and organizations we strive to help each individual library become the best it can be. If MCPL were to leave WVLS, there would be a disastrous impact on every other library in the system, the same libraries that have called Wausau and its branches "friends." I realize your first responsibility is to your patrons who live in both urban and rural communities across Marathon County; but please also consider the larger community that will be affected by your decision. The other libraries in this system look to MCPL for leadership and collaboration, expertise and resources. If MCPL leaves to join the South Central Library System, it will have a lasting and devastating effect on each one of us.

I ask that you table this decision for the moment. Please wait until our economy and society are in a more stable position and services have been restored to a more normal level. If you have identified areas in which you require better or different service from WVLS, please discuss this with them and allow time for desired changes to be made. I hope you will evaluate carefully how your actions will ripple out to every single library part of WVLS, and the negative consequences that will result. Again, I ask, who do you want to be?

Thank you very much for reading this letter and understanding that your decision impacts significantly more than Marathon County.

Sincerely,  
Carla Huston, Library Director  
Jean M. Thomsen Memorial Library