

November 3, 2020

MCPL Task Force:

This report addresses the impact of a MCPL departure on the remaining libraries in WVLS, including the options they would have, and how they would continue to receive services. It also addresses the ability for MCPL to serve as a resource library and whether other libraries would be able to join SCLS if MCPL changed its affiliation. The statutes, system staff, library directors, and both online catalogs were consulted to obtain these answers.

As part of my responsibilities at the state library agency (DPI), I have frequent contact with all 16 public library system directors and various system staff, and I know many of the 381 public library directors in our state. I hold both of these systems in high regard; both are excellent systems staffed by dedicated people, and neither have recent history of deficiency in response to the system effectiveness statement, as required on each library board's annual report to DPI. At least according to their annual reports, member libraries are satisfied with both systems.

A library board is not legally required to provide justification when changing system affiliations. Per [s. 43.18\(1\)](#) of the statutes, a participating municipality or a county may withdraw from the system by adoption of a resolution by a two-thirds vote of its governing body, at least 6 months prior to the close of the system's fiscal year. A library would first have to withdraw from its current library system before affiliating with another, and then remain a member for no less than 3 years before it could make a change again.

The most significant impacts to the remaining libraries, if MCPL were to depart by this method, would stem from WVLS losing the funds from both the membership fees from MCPL (\$80,000) and the reduction in state aid (\$375,000) that the system would qualify for. Such loss would require WVLS to reduce the services it could offer, and some staff that offer them. WVLS has discussed the possibility of reductions in such services as the number of database subscriptions, scholarships, professional development opportunities, and spending on the OverDrive Advantage collection, as examples. Such action would not only reduce the services available to the remaining libraries, but would also likely increase their fees, as they currently rely upon MCPL to drive cooperative project costs and other fees down. In other words, they would likely have to pay more for less, which increases the inequity in that region of the state-- something that the Wisconsin library community has spent years trying to repair through the Public Library System Redesign (PLSR) project. The mission of the PLSR project is to ensure all Wisconsin public libraries have

the capacity to provide equitable access to excellent library services regardless of the race, ethnicity, income, gender, or employment status of the people they serve, or *their location within the state*. A reduction in services would push WVLS libraries farther from this goal.

The remaining libraries expressed that they would also miss MCPL's leadership, not just as the system's resource library, but as a larger library with more staff. As a larger library, other libraries rely upon MCPL staff to serve on system committees and in other capacities, in ways that staff at smaller libraries cannot because they lack the staffing that would allow them to take time away from their libraries. If MCPL departs, these libraries would have to find a way to participate more fully and directly on system committees; this can be very challenging for the small libraries in particular, but also for understaffed libraries of any size.

MCPL will not be able to continue as the resource library for WVLS if it changes affiliation because, per [s. 43.16\(2\)](#), the resource library must be a member public library that meets specific requirements (it must have a collection size of at least 100,000 volumes, be open to the public at least 50 hours each week, and it must employ at least one full-time, permanent reference librarian with an MLS). If no member library meets those requirements, then WVLS must contract with either the academic library with the largest operating budget in the system area who meets the requirements, or with a resource library in an adjacent system-- in this case, the choices are limited to the libraries Appleton, Brown County, Eau Claire, La Crosse, Madison, or Superior.

None of the remaining WVLS libraries currently meet these requirements; however, one of them could see this as an opportunity to serve as the regional resource library. Platteville Public Library provides this service and leadership for the South West Library System despite not having the collection size to be the sole resource library. SWLS contracts with Madison Public to fulfill the statutory requirement.

Remaining libraries will likely be damaged by the withdrawal of MCPL's collections from the ILS; however, MCPL is a net borrower, which means that it fills its own patron requests for items through the use of the other libraries' materials more than their own. The smaller libraries are net lenders, which means that they lend more materials to other libraries like MCPL more than they borrow. That is not unique to MCPL; large libraries commonly borrow from others more than they lend. Madison Public is a net borrower as well. Regardless, the loss of those materials will increase the pressure on local libraries to have stronger, more self-sufficient collections, which, of course, costs money.

In response to the question of whether other WVLS libraries could follow suit: Counties are the building blocks of public library systems; any change in system affiliation precipitated by this one would need to take place at the county level, per [s. 43.18\(1\)\(ar\)](#). For this to happen, the municipal governing bodies with libraries that make up at least 80 percent of the total population of all the municipalities with libraries within a county would have to approve withdrawal from the system. If that happened, then all libraries

within that county would be required to change system affiliation. That said, libraries whose municipal borders cross county lines-- such as Abbotsford, Colby, and Dorchester-- have the option to change their declaration of home county, which, in effect, could allow them to choose which system to affiliate with. While not truly an exception, the system borders align in this particular circumstance, allowing these libraries that choice, as only municipal borders are considered when determining home county (the physical location of the library building is irrelevant). Generally, however, the decision to change systems may only be done county by county, not library by library.

The MCPL board is not legally required to take any of these effects into consideration when making its decision, but the decision should make sense for MCPL, and for Marathon County residents most of all. I would like to offer some clarifications, and recommend that the MCPL board consider them when making its decision.

Wisconsin's public library systems were founded in 1971 with the belief that, while library service is a matter of statewide concern, each region has its own unique culture and set of circumstances. The MCPL board should consider any possible effects of affiliating with a system outside its own region.

We have heard about the comparison between the number of items each system has in its shared ILS. When considering the size of collection, the board should also consider the number of users in the system, and user habits. While SCLS has a larger collection, it also has many more users, and those users are accustomed to the high demand of materials in the system and actively place holds to get their items. This does not appear to be the case in WVLS. In a comparison of holds queues for 25 random fiction and nonfiction books on the NYT bestseller list, WVLS shows, on average, fewer than 2 holds per item on the bestseller list, while SCLS shows more than 5 holds per item on the same titles. Many factors can affect the wait time, including reduced transportation efforts, population density, and frequency of patron visits. However, the maximum number of holds on an individual item was 107 for WVLS, and 669 in SCLS. This difference in user habits may come as a shock to MCPL patrons, many of whom just want their items and do not care about internal processes or system affiliations. A culture change of this magnitude will require a well-organized public relations plan as MCPL educates and trains its patrons in the use of a new online catalog.

Connection with the UW was presented as a benefit of changing systems. I am not sure I understand this, because the UW is not in the SCLS ILS, and MCPL would still need to go through interlibrary loan to access its collections, just as it does now. That process would not change, and nothing prohibits MCPL from developing such relationships now.

The MCPL board should be aware that a top priority of PLSR implementation is the development of a new statewide delivery model. Any changes in this model, which will be determined in collaboration with the statewide delivery network participants including the 16 public library systems, might alter the role that SCLS plays in statewide delivery. At

this point, it would be difficult to predict how that would impact delivery cost or service, but such change should be considered when making this decision.

While none of these factors is insurmountable, the MCPL board should take them all into consideration to fully understand the effects they may have on those who reside in Marathon County. If the board is undecided about system affiliation at this time, then it may wish to explore these issues further. If, however, the board is certain that MCPL will change systems, it may wish to further consider whether now is the right time to do so. The Wisconsin Library Association's Library Development and Legislation Committee is aware of legislative concern over funding of public libraries in response to the negative public perception of library closures during the pandemic. The MCPL board should carefully consider the stability of its support from the county at this time, so that it can make a sustainable decision that is in the best interest of the residents of Marathon County.

Respectfully submitted,

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