



Arrowhead Library System

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Judith Robson
Room 124 North
State Capitol
P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Senator Robson:

Thank you for co-sponsoring Senate Bill 66, which increases funding to public library systems. In this letter, I wish to share with you some of how the passage of this funding legislation will affect the public library system in Rock County.

Background: In the early 1970's, almost a quarter of Wisconsin's population had no access to public libraries. To solve this, the state entered into a partnership with local municipalities and counties for the provision of library service. Counties agreed to pay cities to enable library access for rural residents. Cities agreed to open the doors of their libraries to non-residents from rural areas, as well as those from other nearby cities and counties. In return for this, the state created public library systems to undertake projects too expensive or complex for cities and counties acting alone, and agreed to fund systems at a set percentage of the previous year's local public library expenditures. Your own public library system--one of 17 in Wisconsin, is Arrowhead Library System, which serves 7 member public libraries and almost 150,000 residents of Rock County.

The Problem: The state has never fully funded its commitment to public library systems. Because of the lack of full funding, our ability to serve the citizens of Wisconsin has eroded badly. To correct this, in the last session, a legislative council study recommended restoring the state commitment to public library system funding to the level of 13% of the previous year's public library expenditures. Legislation to this effect was passed by both houses of the legislature and signed by the Governor. To achieve this 13% funding, the Department of Public Instruction requested an addition to base increase of just over \$5 million in the first biennium, and just over \$6 million in the second for public library systems. The Arrowhead Library System (ALS) share of this new funding would be about \$125,000 annually. The Governor recommended no increase whatsoever.

The Consequences

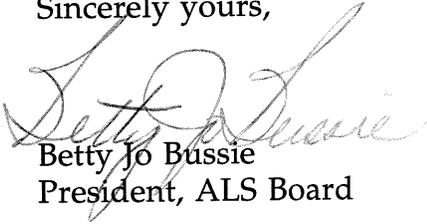
Technology: For the past several years, Arrowhead Library System, in cooperation with its member libraries, has brought a whole new world of information to the people in Rock County by making Internet available at their local public libraries. We are actively upgrading our Internet system, and during 1999 we will install improved Internet capability at the Eager Free Public Library in Evansville, the Clinton Public Library, and the Milton Public Library. Our next step in the process is to make the catalogs of our public libraries accessible using the Internet and the World Wide Web. If we do this, the long-term goal of having Wisconsin residents be able to access information "from anywhere, at any time," will take a giant step toward becoming a reality. Unfortunately, most of our technology development has been funded by shrinking federal dollars and adept grant writing on the part of system staff. To make equal access to information for Wisconsin residents a reality, we need a fulfillment of the State's promise of 13% funding.

Training : In Wisconsin, public library systems are in the forefront of providing technology training to the public. Since 1995, Arrowhead Library System has conducted regular Internet training sessions and demonstrations throughout Rock County. ALS training sessions have been regularly cablecast by JATV which originates from the Hedberg Public Library in Janesville. The public has responded to this offering by creating a demand for training so that not even our largest member public libraries, Hedberg Public Library in Janesville, and the Beloit Public Library, can keep ahead of demand. Without a funding increase in system aids, we are faced with being able to offer less in the years 2000 and 2001, while public demand is ever increasing.

The Cost to our Quality of Life: Funding for public library systems in the State of Wisconsin has remained flat for almost 10 years. During this time of fiscal erosion, many state mandated services have been severely trimmed to make ends meet. For example, ALS is no longer able to provide library consultation for children's services. Our mandated services to what librarians call "special needs" populations, consist primarily of circulating large print books to area nursing homes. While it can be said that we are performing some activities for Wisconsin's "special needs" populations, we are not fulfilling a promised mandate. We don't have the money; the required state funding has not been provided.

The Solution: The need is critical, and the consequences of inaction are severe. The economy of the state is robust. Dollars are available. Priorities are the only question. I urge you, on behalf of the public we all serve, to do anything you can to help restore dollars to the state budget for increased aid to public library systems, and to thus honor the state's commitment to this important service. Thank you for your consideration of this issue.

Sincerely yours,



Betty Jo Bussie
President, ALS Board

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