

Dear Nancy,

Having studied and discussed the current proposed model for state support of public libraries the Board of Trustees of the Mideastern Michigan Library Cooperative (MMLC) voted unanimously at its January meeting to send a letter of concern. MMLC provides services for 16 public libraries, four academic libraries, one special library, and 10 school libraries located in eight counties. The Board of Trustees is very proud of the coop's contribution to the strengthening of patron services for our member libraries of all sizes.

One of our major concerns with the model is the role assigned to coops. That role appears designed to eliminate coops altogether, therefore depriving small and medium size libraries of a support system they cannot afford to purchase privately. In a plan where cooperatives have no basic financial support, the ability to provide cost-effective, competitive services to libraries will likely be impossible, especially if those services are restricted to a limited list. Overhead costs alone would price services out of the range of small library systems.

Training as detailed in this proposal does not include anything related to children's services, customer service, millages, hiring practices, etc. These valuable services are today done by cooperatives within their region, providing a layer of service in all parts of the state which MLC, MLA, and LM cannot duplicate. Those who designed PA 89 of 1977 saw that there needed to be regional centers around the state to upgrade library service for all the residents. Cooperatives have met this challenge and used economies of scale to get technology and other services to every library.

With the plan as it stands the smaller, less affluent libraries are being left out of the loop. We as a Board of Trustees of a successful coop firmly believe that regional library operations should exist across the state and that without such operations to advocate for the specific needs of "their" libraries the Library of Michigan will have abandoned a significant number of communities.

The model as proposed is based on the status quo and fundamental future issues are unresolved, with details left to the imagination. We have attached a series of questions that we feel must be addressed to create a workable future plan for co-operatives and member libraries (Appendix 1).

The MMLC Board believes that the above issues regarding this proposal need to be addressed. We suggest that a professional study of the delivery of library services at local, regional and state levels is needed. The results of such a study should show through data and objective observation how to reorganize to provide the best, most stable library services possible for every Michigan citizen.

Sincerely,

Jane F. Smith
Mideastern Michigan Library Cooperative Board Chair

Cc: Dr. William Anderson

APPENDIX 1: Questions Regarding Proposal To Be Addressed

- What is the plan for transition from the current PA 89 to a new program?
- How do the present cooperatives transition to the future cooperatives?
- What happens to the assets of the present cooperatives?
- What happens to staff?
- What does a “temporary subsidy” from state aid for cooperatives mean?
- Do all of the present cooperatives get the proposed subsidy or only cooperatives formed under a new law?
- How many cooperatives will there be?
- Would they cover the entire state?
- Did the designers of the proposal think that the long-term contracts would include some overhead costs that might be considered a membership fee?
- How much of the state aid is to be spent on the core services? Does this mean that each year the libraries and the LM must decide how much is spent on core services, how much is paid as state aid to public libraries?
- How will the academic and school libraries pay their share of core services? What about out-of-state electronic universities?
- Regarding MeL Delivery, will every library get 5 day a week delivery or will it be pro-rated based on the size of the library? Will only public libraries get delivery or will every library in MeLCat get delivery?
- What participation will public libraries have in the selection of MeL databases?