Dear Steering Committee Members:

On behalf of the Jefferson County Library Services Board, I would like to share some thoughts with you about our recent experience moving from the Mid-Wisconsin Federated Library System to the Waukesha County Federated Library System (now known as Bridges Library System). We think some of what we learned might be helpful to you as you consider ways to improve state library systems. We’d like to make three points:

1. We believe that the regional library system structure in Wisconsin is effective. The current model offers highly valued local control and responsiveness to stakeholders. When we realized our system was not as effective as others around us - not providing our county with the services our libraries expected and making questionable decisions - we were glad that we had alternative options. We did considerable research and found a better fit with Waukesha County. What a blessing that has been; we love our new Bridges Library System! We chose it, so we’re invested and engaged. The Mid-Wisconsin Library System might have been the ‘right size’ on paper, but it didn’t provide good service. And that’s what counts. When you allow counties free choice and give them excellent viable options, counties and libraries become engaged stakeholders. **Let effectiveness be your guide.**

2. If you want to improve library systems and provide more equity throughout the state, we’d suggest you identify ways they are not working well and attempt to fix those issues instead of redesigning the entire structure. Too many resources will be spent changing the structure with almost no guarantee that the underlying problems won’t still exist. It is our experience that it is better to **have standards of service and hold library systems accountable** if you wish to make improvements where they are needed.

3. Even though library systems are state funded agencies, **remembering the important role of counties is imperative.** We can speak firsthand about why that’s important. Perhaps a library system “resource county” would actually be more helpful in today’s climate for a variety of reasons. Counties can offer legal advice, fiscal support, human resources expertise, professional purchasing and could strengthen the position of the library systems in Wisconsin. An equally important benefit is that it would likely improve counties’ relationships with their library system, resulting in additional understanding of and support for libraries throughout Wisconsin.

Thank you for your consideration of our thoughts. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have. Best wishes as you steer this project forward.

Sincerely,

Linda Ager, President
Jefferson County Library Board