April 16, 2018

Dear PLSR Steering Committee Members:

Congratulations to each of you and to all the library community’s workgroup members for the publication of the Workgroup Recommendations Reports. The Bridges Library System Board understands the work involved has been significant and we applaud everyone’s dedication and diligence.

We remain interested in the process and have the following comments for your consideration.

Although a model for providing coordinated library services to the libraries in the state has not yet been determined, we encourage you to consider the benefits of the current regional library system structure. We believe the current model affords optimal opportunity for success as it combines local autonomy, aggregation of resources, and appropriate accountability. This model is not perfect and we acknowledge work needs to be done to improve each library system’s ability to meet its mission. We agree that the equity conversation is important. We are also keenly aware needs and priorities vary from library to library and region to region.

A regional service approach has distinct advantages. Workgroup recommendations could be piloted with fewer unknown costs, reducing risk and increasing the chance for success. A completely different model has a significant potential to undo the progress achieved in state funding for libraries in the last biennial budget. A regional library system approach is, at its core, a decentralized form of governance. While there may be some disadvantages, the advantages are significant. The decentralized structure allows for more dynamic and responsive services and includes built-in incentives for innovation—especially when proper accountability is in place. The model put in place 40 years ago has allowed the Bridges Library System to offer outstanding services to our libraries under the guidance of meaningful citizen participation of board members. While some elements are due for updating—including the statutory requirements of library system services—we believe the fundamental model is sound. We strongly urge the steering committee to examine the structure and improve it instead of developing a new model that centralizes decision-making at the state level.

The workgroup reports identify a multitude of opportunities worth exploring. We believe the ones with the most potential could be implemented the most successfully within the current regional library system structure.

Sincerely,

Richard Nawrocki, President (on behalf of the Bridges Library System Board)