July 17, 2018

Dear PLSR Steering Committee Members:

As you approach the end of a long process to examine library systems in Wisconsin, we’d like to take this opportunity to thank you for your service to the Wisconsin library community. We know that each person who worked on this project did so with the goal of improving libraries throughout the state. We’re grateful for that and we understand it because in our role as trustees on the Bridges Library System Board we strive to do that for our member libraries with every decision we make.

We are pleased to see Model W and Model Y come forward through the process. Both of these models continue a regional library system structure—something we believe is key to success in the future. With that being said, we believe the two models are vastly different in a number of important ways. Model W suggests a funding formula change to address the stated project goals. Model Y offers no actual solutions to address the equity issue other than hypothesizing that economies of scale will offer savings which will somehow translate into more equitable services. Model W suggests a task force to review the minimum standards of library system service and discusses improving accountability. Model Y does not. In fact, Model Y seems to suggest that moving to larger (and fewer) regional library systems is an answer in and of itself. It is conjecture to say that larger and fewer regional library systems would realize economies of scale without supporting data. Sometimes economies of scale are not realized or diseconomies of scale occur. What is certain is that larger regions as proposed in Model Y would require vast and costly change, introduce a high risk of failure, decrease each library’s individual voice, and negatively impact important county library work that needs improving throughout the state if equity for the citizens of Wisconsin is truly the goal.

The models are vastly different in another important way. Model W suggests incremental change and the importance of incentivizing small library systems to move to partner with larger, more viable library systems. We applaud that approach. Model Y suggests forcing consolidation from above, affects everyone in the state, and would be a highly controversial action. We believe Model Y, especially the piece that would force consolidations, would jeopardize future budget requests for state aid to library systems. We will not support a model that we believe risks, in any way, the legislative support that has been achieved with the last biennial budget process that resulted in a much needed increase in funding for library systems.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

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