

Memo

To: Montana State Library Commission

From: Darlene Staffeldt, State Librarian

Date: April 2, 2009

Re: PEEL Scholarship employment requirements – Catherine McMullen

Issue: Has Catherine McMullen fulfilled the conditions of her scholarship agreement and/or can we extend her an additional six months to find employment in a Montana Library?

Background: When the Montana State Library applied to the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services for the Professional Education and Employment for Librarians (PEEL) scholarship monies we made a strong argument in our grant application that a significant percentage of Montana tribal college, public and school libraries do not employ professional librarians. We wanted to specifically help these libraries address this need so we set the employment qualifications to include only those three types of libraries. Additionally we required the scholarship recipients to locate a position in Montana and to hold such position for at least 24 months.

Each scholarship recipient signed a scholarship program agreement before accepting the scholarship monies. The agreement states the following regarding employment:

“Upon completion of the MLIS degree, I will fulfill the employment requirement for receiving a scholarship. I agree to apply for a professional position in a Montana public library, public school library (elementary, middle or high school), or tribal library. I agree to accept any appropriate position offered to me no matter where it is located in the state of Montana, and to hold any such position for at least 24 months. I understand that failure to seek employment and to provide proof to MSL that I have sought such employment, refusing an appropriate position, or not working in the state for 24 months in a professional position, will require that I repay the scholarship funds in

full and with interest to MSL. If within six months of graduating I have not found employment due to unavailability of eligible positions or of eligible positions not being offered to me, I will contact MSL to provide documentation that I was unable to find or was not offered suitable employment. **At that time, the Montana State Librarian will review the documentation and make a recommendation to the Montana State Library Commission about repayment of the scholarship.**"

Although Catherine has applied for a number of positions and was for a short time employed by the State Prison Library, she currently is not employed in a Montana library. Catherine stated in an April 1, 2009 report: "I began a position as a librarian at the Montana State Prison in Deer Lodge on February 23, 2009. Unfortunately the prison environment was a bad fit for me. As a librarian I think it is my duty to help people find information and access resources to improve their lives. The goal of my position at the state prison was to supervise, provide security, and control access to information. I resigned from this position on March 20, 2009 after unsuccessfully trying to reconcile the reality of prison life with my ethical duties as a librarian."

Options:

(1) Determine that Catherine has met the terms of the grant agreement and release her from the obligation of paying back the scholarship.

Pros: It is the option that Catherine wants and allows her to search for any suitable employment to support her family.

Cons: It is not consistent with the scholarship grant agreement and goals and does not add a professional librarian to any of Montana's libraries.

(2) Grant Catherine an extension of six months to pursue employment in a PEEL scholarship employment priority library (school, public or tribal library).

Pros: It is consistent with the original intent of the grant application submitted to the Institute of Museums and Library Services;

Provides better opportunity for public, school, and tribal libraries in Montana to hire a professional librarian; and

Allows Catherine additional time to find employment in a way that would help her meet the grant agreement requirements.

Cons: It is not consistent with the timeline of only six months within the grant agreement signed by the recipient and would require more work on her part to seek out and apply for additional positions.

(3) Ask Catherine to pay back the scholarship monies.

Pros: Consistent with the grant agreement signed by the recipient

Cons: Would create a hardship to Catherine and her family;

Would create additional paperwork for the State Library staff to “return” the funds to the federal government; and

Would not provide a professionally trained librarian to a Montana library at this time.

Recommendation: The State Librarian’s recommendation (supported by the PEEL Scholarship Advisory Committee) to the State Library Commission is to extend to Catherine an additional six months to find appropriate Montana public, school or tribal library employment.

Please let me know if you have any questions on this item. Thank you.