

**Fair Library Access for All Montanans:  
A Resolution From the Montana State Library Commission, Regarding Fair Standard  
Access to Library Content and Services for All Montanans**

Montana State Library Commission, Aaron LaFromboise, Chair

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**Montanans' Dignity**

Whereas all Montanans are born with inherent, inviolable dignity;<sup>3</sup>

Whereas all Montanans are at liberty to pursue life's basic necessities, health, and happiness;<sup>4</sup>

**Right to Lifelong Learning**

Whereas in pursuit of life's basic necessities, health, and happiness, all Montanans have the right to seek information and pursue ideas, through any media, regardless of location,<sup>5</sup> and without discrimination;<sup>6</sup>

Whereas it is Montana's constitutional goal to establish a system of education which will develop the full potential of each person, with equitable education opportunities being guaranteed to each person of the state;<sup>7</sup>

Whereas, the Montana State Library (MSL) is aligned with and affirms the American Library Association's placing high value in a learning society, and in affirming libraries' vital and cooperative role in supporting all Montanans' lifelong pursuit of inquiry and learning for all;<sup>8</sup>

**Montana State Library's Role**

Whereas libraries exist to help Montanans to enrich and inform themselves;<sup>9</sup>

Whereas Montana State Library's purpose is to assist all organizations, communities, and Montanans to thrive through excellent library resources and services;<sup>10</sup>

Whereas it is MSL's duty to directly provide or distribute access to library content and services, sufficient to each user's needs, to all Montanans;<sup>11</sup>

Whereas MSL's many dynamic relationships with users and partners include, either directly or indirectly, local, State<sup>12</sup> and Federal agencies, all Montanans, and all of Montana's libraries' communities including all those they serve;<sup>13 14</sup>

Whereas because MSL provides content or services to users through its relationships with governmental agencies, libraries, or other institutional partners, it follows that MSL measures its success by evaluating the degree to which, through its efforts, individual users have access to sufficient library content and services to meet their needs;<sup>15</sup>

## **Fair (equitable) Access**

Whereas to thrive, all Montanans deserve convenient access to sufficient<sup>16</sup> (if not necessarily the same<sup>17</sup>) library content and services, so that they may seek information and pursue ideas;<sup>18</sup>

Whereas Montana's communities vary, in regards to the availability of local resources,<sup>19</sup> in differences between each communities' ability to provide their users with sufficient resources, and in their ability to participate as a partner with other sources of Montana information resources, including the Montana State Library;

Whereas all Montana communities experience gaps in library services,<sup>20</sup> and vary in their ability to help their users and their communities thrive; therefore, let it be<sup>21</sup>

## **Resolution**

Resolved, that the Montana State Library acknowledges that that there is an uneven distribution of library services throughout Montana, and that there are disparities in the sufficiency of library services;

Montanans have unique critical needs for convenient access to sustainably funded,<sup>22</sup> sufficient unto each Montanan's needs, high-quality library content and services;

With its partners and all Montana Libraries, Montana State Library commits to developing and implementing a statewide strategy, toward the goal of providing all Montanans with equitable, sufficient access to library resources;

That all Montana's libraries, all Montana State Library's partners, and all state agencies will be encouraged to join in this statewide strategy; so that

All Montanans<sup>23</sup> will have access to library content and services, sufficient unto their needs.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fourth Draft Revisions — There have been a number of large and small changes made to this fourth draft. In the interest of trusting MSL’s communities’ ability to help the Commission improve this Resolution, and in the interest of transparency, these endnotes are included with this fourth draft.

There are several re-phrasings, where a better word was selected to make meaning clearer or improve the Resolution’s readability.

Similarly, the 3rd draft included several lists of users (for example); these lists were replaced by “All Montanans.” The intent is to include, with Montanans, others served by Montana libraries and their partners. ‘All Montanans’ means just that. All are included, none are excluded. As a goal, this is a stretch, but it is consistent with stature and our values. bn

A new ‘Whereas’ was added under The State Library’s Role, beginning “Whereas MSL’s role frequently provides content or services to users through its relationships…”

The intent here is to acknowledge that MSL provides individuals with library content and services, either directly or indirectly via our relationships with governmental agencies, other libraries, and other partners. This ‘Whereas’ acknowledges that even when our content and services are consumed through the auspices of others, and while we acknowledge that MSL’s partnerships have strong organizational aspects, in the end our success is most usefully evaluated by the degree to which users have convenient access to quality library content and services, sufficient unto their needs. While imperfect, MSL’s success is best measured by individuals’ successes.

New endnotes have been added, or existing endnotes have been expanded upon in response to comments or questions from Montana librarians and other MSL partners.

<sup>2</sup> Third draft endnote — This draft includes several copy-editing type changes, intended to make the document clearer, not to alter the meaning of the draft discussed by the Commission in February. The revised end-notes simply rely upon making the differentiation between equal (the same or identical) and equitable (not necessarily the same, but sufficient to the user’s needs or purposes). This modified draft has been shared with Aaron, Anne, and Jennie. bn

<sup>3</sup> The Constitution of the State of Montana, Article II, Declaration of Rights, Part II, Declaration of Rights, Section 4, Individual Dignity

<sup>4</sup> The Constitution of the State of Montana, Article II, Declaration of Rights, Part II, Declaration of Rights, Section 3, Inalienable Rights

<sup>5</sup> UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR\\_Translations/eng.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Constitution of the State of Montana. Article II. Declaration of Rights. Part II. Declaration of Rights. Section 4. Individual Dignity

<sup>7</sup> MCA 2017, Constitution. Article X, Education and Public Lands, Part X, Educational Goals and Duties, Section 1.

<sup>8</sup> American Library Association Mission. ALA Policy Manual A.1.1 Introduction. <http://www.ala.org/aboutala/governance/policymanual/updatedpolicymanual/section1/1mission>

<sup>9</sup> MCA 2017, 22-1-302, Free Public Libraries Purpose

<sup>10</sup> Purpose, from Montana State Library Strategic Framework, Adopted December 14, 2016.

In response to a comment/question about MSL's extra-public library roles: MSL has provided assistance to all types of Montana libraries for at least several decades. This multi-type, inclusive perception of its role is based, as is this resolution, on the notion that all Montana libraries strive to help Montanans thrive. Our users are less likely to care about what type of library they're using (academic, public, school, or special) than they are desirous of receiving convenient help. A K-12 student was likely served by their public library pre-K, served by their school and public library during schooling, and may be served by served by an academic library after graduation. During this time, their parents continue to be served by public libraries, and all are likely being served, if indirectly, by special libraries (such as MSL, CEIC, the Dept. of Transportation, medical libraries, and so forth).

In summary, because in the end it's whether patrons are getting what they need to be thrived, and because libraries are better able to serve patrons when libraries work as partners with one another, MSL mission includes serving all of Montana's libraries, regardless of type. bn

<sup>11</sup> This restates in one MSL's stated purpose and roles. Specifically: Our purpose: The Montana State Library (MSL) helps all organizations, communities, and Montanans thrive through excellent library resources and services. Our roles:

(1) The Montana State Library is the source for State Government Information, Natural Resources Information, and Geographic Information, for all Montanans.

(2) MSL supports the development and excellence of Montana's tax-supported public libraries.

(3) MSL supports reading for Montanans with visual or physical disabilities.

<sup>12</sup> MCA 22-1-211 (2). 2017

<sup>13</sup> "...and those they serve..." is added in response to comments indicating that some Montana libraries and some MSL partners serve non-Montanans, for example, long-haul truck drivers, vacationers, or federal employees serving adjacent states.

<sup>14</sup> Earlier drafts attempted to list MSL's users and partners, if possible using language from Statute or Rule. Many commenters noted that any list, attempting to be comprehensive and all-inclusive, was bound to miss somebody. Responding to these concerns, this 4th draft makes a general statement but doesn't include a longer list. From the 3rd draft: "(1) Montana's blind and physically handicapped citizens, (2) State agencies, employees, and contractors working for state agencies, (3) Federal agencies and cooperators, (4) Montana's geographical information systems community, (5) Montana's natural heritage community, and (6) All Montanans, either directly or indirectly, all Montana libraries, and all Montana's libraries' communities;"

<sup>15</sup> This paragraph is new to this 4th draft.

<sup>16</sup> Several have commented that ‘sufficient’ is a low bar, that ‘sufficiency’ may not reflect social norms and that it may result in the delivery of okay as opposed to excellent library content and services. Our view differs.

We believe that every person’s needs are complex, dynamic, and often unique. Perfectly meeting just one person’s needs, sufficiently, is hard enough. Perfectly meeting each individual’s needs, within a community, is a very high bar indeed. Perhaps it is impossible, but it’s what we are suggesting that we strive for, and it’s how we’re suggesting that we measure our success. If, for example, the needs of a scholar in Bozeman are being completely satisfied, but in Two Dot, pre-school children are not receiving encouragement toward literacy, then we’re being shown where improvement is needed.

Additionally, we have had some email discussion about word choice. One person suggested that the word ‘responsive’ was a better choice than ‘sufficient’. I have retained the word sufficient because sufficient refers to the user’s experience of library service. Responsive references how the library responded to the user’s needs. Part of the intent of this resolution commit to measuring users’ success, not libraries’ efforts. Additionally, sufficiency is an active word, connoting the quality of experience. We’re committing to go beyond doing the right thing, instead, we are staking our success with our patrons’ successes. bn

<sup>17</sup> Equality is treating everybody the same. This sounds great, until one considers that not everybody’s needs are the same. Equity honors people’s diverse needs by giving everyone what they need to be successful. This explanation is loosely (if faithfully) summarized from several sources, including: <https://publichealthonline.gwu.edu/blog/equity-vs-equality/>

<sup>18</sup> The idea of *sufficiency* suggests that statewide equitable library access doesn’t mean everyone has the *same* content and services, but instead, that everyone has access to the library content and services *sufficient* for their purposes and respectful of their equal rights as Montanans and human beings. An often-used cartoon (Illustration #1), illustrating this concept, is included below these end-notes.

<sup>19</sup> In response to an excellent (and difficult) question about the natures of equity and fairness (which includes the notions of patron or community responsibility):

We believe there are two legitimate views of fairness. These two notions are different, but not in opposition to one another. In fact, we think in regards to ‘fairness’ or ‘equity’, both notions are equally valid and germane. The following hopefully explanatory quotes are excerpted from an Atlantic article, ‘Conservatives Have a Different Definition of ‘Fair’: And liberals ignore it at their peril’. April 30, 2019. Dan Meegan, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/04/why-conservatives-hate-warrens-loan-debt-relief-plan/588322/>

The first view centers around the idea of need: “...Some people have more than they need, and others need more than they have...” This liberal view might look at the illustration below, and think that it shows a fair deal; everyone gets what they need.

The second view of fairness “...value[s] equity, or proportionality, and they see unfairness when people are asked to contribute more than they should expect to receive in return, or when people receive more than they contribute.” This conservative view embodies the notions of responsibility and our shared social contract. This view might think that it’s all well in good that everyone in the second frame is watching the ball game, but they might well note that all three baseball fans shown are free riders (see immediately below), who didn’t pay for their tickets and are in effect stealing from those that did, and the franchise owners.

(For a discussion of ‘free riders’, see Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrom’s views from *Governing the Commons*, Cambridge, 1990. Discussed: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elinor\\_Ostrom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elinor_Ostrom), see also [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free-rider\\_problem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free-rider_problem))

Our view is that both views of fairness have merit, and reflect Montana’s realities. Clearly, everyone has a responsibility to make the most of themselves and hew to the terms of our social contract. Equally clearly, if our neighbor needs help, to the best of our ability we help them. We understand that the world is a complicated place. We think that by necessity, wise public policy acknowledges the validity of both notions of fairness. We value all Montanans equally. We commit to encouraging responsibility in all Montanans and all Montana communities (both libraries and other partners). We will strive to provide equitable opportunities for all. These are not conflicting, but rather complementary beliefs and values. And a high bar, policy-wise. bn

<sup>20</sup> This acknowledges that all Montana libraries are to some degree, imperfect in their ability to provide all their users all that they need to thrive. As human institutions, libraries (no matter the degree of their successes) always have room for improvement.

In response to several questions about this Resolution’s impact on small, rural libraries: It is our intent that all Montana’s libraries’ users will have access to library content and services, sufficient unto their individual needs. This is what we are calling ‘equity’. This is a lofty goal. It won’t happen overnight. It’ll need a lot of work; all of us, pulling together. But that’s our intent. bn

<sup>21</sup> Montana libraries vary in their local capacity to meet users' needs. They vary by (1) Staff size, the depth of staff skills, and differences in their staff's overall experience; (2) By differences in their buildings, services available, and information resources; and (3) By differences in their community's relative ability to pay for content and services, to match local user requirements (measured by disparities in taxable property value within a library's service area or support from its governing institution, by differences in median household or per capita income, and by differences in capacity brought about by differences in size and scale of services).

<sup>22</sup> From and restated, MCA 2017, 22.1.302. Purpose (of free public libraries)

<sup>23</sup> Deleted: "... regardless of where they live, regardless of their economic status, regardless of their race, sex, culture, social origin or condition, and regardless of their political or religious ideas..." As above, rather than catalog all the possible reasons for inequitable service, this just keeps it simple. "All Montanans." Period. The lists are implied, while left unspoken.

<sup>24</sup> List from Montana Constitution. This list implies that differences in geographical location or economic wealth should not be disqualifying circumstances.

Illustration #1: Equityity v. Equity

[http://i2.wp.com/interactioninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/IISC\\_EqualityEquity.png?zoom=2&resize=730%2C547](http://i2.wp.com/interactioninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/IISC_EqualityEquity.png?zoom=2&resize=730%2C547)

