The Idaho Commission for Libraries assists libraries to build the capacity to better serve their clientele.

8 February 2016

TO: Senator Dean Mortimer, Co-Chair
        Representative Luke Malek, Co-Chair
        Broadband Access Study Committee

FROM: Ann Joslin, State Librarian

RE: Public Library broadband needs

Dear Senator Mortimer and Representative Malek:

I'm writing with comments on the Interim Broadband Access Study Committee's DRSBB083, the Education Opportunity Resource Act. I appreciate the opportunity to review the draft prior to the Committee's next meeting.

After hearing the Committee discussion of potential recommendations to the full Legislature, I understood that the intent was to offer the same support to all E-rate eligible entities – K-12 schools, IDLA, Juvenile Corrections, School for the Deaf and Blind, and public libraries. I believe the RS is unclear on that point; the entities are listed in 33-5604 as the focus of the Education Opportunity Resource Committee, yet all other sections and sub-sections specify only school districts. On behalf of all libraries I request the Committee consider including Idaho's 145 central and branch community libraries as participants in the fiscal and technical assistance described throughout this act.

Broadband is essential to 21st century library service

Broadband in Idaho public libraries is a critical resource for education, economic development and sustainability in our communities. Public libraries need more broadband to meet current and projected demand – more adequate, scalable, reliable, and affordable broadband.

According to broadbandnow.com data presented to the Committee, Idaho is the 47th most connected state, with only 54% broadband coverage and an underserved population of 21%. Under-deployed residential broadband makes Internet connections in public libraries a critical resource, especially in the rural areas that most of our libraries serve. In addition, librarians tell us that many community members with access at home come to use the library's Internet because of the help provided by professional library staff.

Cost & Capacity

A few libraries in remote areas don't have additional capacity available to them. Many do have choices but cannot afford additional capacity, even with E-rate discounts. As is the case for schools, the cost per

Mbps per month varies widely for libraries. In our 2014 survey, the median was $16.43 but the highest cost was $1,210 per Mbps per month.

FCC targets for public libraries are 100 Mbps for libraries serving fewer than 50,000 people, and 1 Gbps for those with 50,000 or more.

- In our survey, only 1 public library reported 100 Mbps to the door.
- It also showed that 49% of libraries deliver less than .50 Mbps per library-owned device, and only 27% deliver more than 1 Mbps. These are not adequate speeds to access an increasing number of resources and services, especially for Idahoans who rely upon libraries for job skill training information, resume writing, GED testing, and submitting college and job applications.
- Many people bring their own devices to use the library wi-fi, which further slows the speed. Because they can't afford increased broadband to the door, some libraries limit wi-fi to certain portions of the building and others limit use of bandwidth-heavy applications.

Libraries support K-12 education, many services are dependent upon sufficient broadband

Public libraries provide resources and services that support Idaho's 60% by 2020 goal; many would not be available to students throughout the state without Internet access at their public library. Examples include:

- Downloading robot and 3D designs to build at the library's MakeIt space
- Homework help in LearningExpress Library – math, language arts, science, logic and more
- College prep tutorials and practice tests
- Career information and prep tutorials
- LiLI databases and the Digital Public Library of America for research assignments
- Access to dual enrollment and Kahn Academy courses

Public libraries are, on average, open 51 hours per week so these resources are available after school, evenings and weekends.

According to IETA testimony, SDE was appropriated $3,390,500 in FY2015 for reimbursement to school districts for one-time and monthly costs; of that, districts requested $1,866,365, reflecting considerable savings. The appropriation for FY2016 is $6,300,000. *Our estimate for reimbursement of the non-E-rate portion of public library Internet costs is approximately $200,000.*

I urge the Committee to seriously consider this small investment to help Idaho public libraries support 21st century education as well as economic development and sustainability in their communities.

Cc: Broadband Access Study Committee Members