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Monday, April 10, 2023

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DPI-NR 2023-20

Investing in public libraries

*Testimony as prepared for delivery by Assistant State Superintendent of the
Division for Libraries and Technology Dr. Darrell Williams*

EAU CLAIRE – *The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction today released the following testimony, as prepared for delivery, to be provided at an upcoming Joint Committee on Finance listening session on the 2023-25 biennial budget. Gov. Tony Evers' budget proposal, released in February, [provides historic support of the state's public schools and libraries during a time of critical need.](#)*

Good morning. My name is Dr. Darrell L. Williams, and I am the Department of Public Instruction's assistant state superintendent for the Division for Libraries and Technology. I am honored to be here to speak about the importance and value of our library systems.

The DPI is advocating for an increase in both FY 24 and FY 25 for aid to Wisconsin's public library systems. This funding is vital to support the day-to-day operations and maintenance of public library services.

Library systems provide baseline services for libraries in our communities so they can use their local funds to best meet their unique, local needs. In the past, library system funding has not kept up with other economic indicators and needs to be increased if libraries are to meet the growing needs of our communities such as providing literacy resources, job search help, and connections to social services.

The DPI is also asking to continue funding for news services such as Newslines for the Blind, and BadgerLink. Newslines for the Blind makes audio news service available for free for anyone who is blind, low-vision, or otherwise print-disabled allowing access to hundreds of publications. BadgerLink, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, makes licensed, trustworthy resources like local newspapers such as the Leader Telegram and national magazines such as Consumer Reports available at no cost to all Wisconsin residents. It also includes historical issues from 10 different newspaper publications outside of Eau Claire, some dating back to the 1800s. BadgerLink provides options to ensure everyone is able to stay informed in our society and encourages a love of lifelong learning.

(more)

You will also see an ask for funding for an internship program to support individuals pursuing a career as a school or public librarian.

- Libraries are experiencing the same challenges of finding qualified staff, especially in our rural areas.
- We have great library schools in the state, but graduates are leaving.
- An internship program would expose these graduates to amazing parts of our state they would not otherwise visit or consider a place to work.

Additionally, the DPI is asking for dedicated funding for Recollection Wisconsin – a digital collection of Wisconsin’s cultural and historic past available for all to explore. This program provides educational opportunities for our students and residents to learn about the rich history of our state. In partnership with the Chippewa Valley Museum, Recollection Wisconsin provides access to oral histories to hear stories of Eau Claire residents who served in WWII, to those who immigrated to the U.S. from places like Norway and Laos. Providing dedicated funding will allow this program to grow and preserve materials ‘now’ before they are lost forever.

Wisconsin libraries are the center of our communities. A library is the one place you can go everywhere without having to go anywhere. Please devote state funding to library system aid, Newslines for the Blind, BadgerLink, and Recollection Wisconsin so our public libraries may continue to provide invaluable resources to all Wisconsin residents. Thank you.

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