

11/2/17

To: The Board of Trustees
Bitterroot Public Library
Nikki McConnell, Chair
Brittany McKenzie, Vice Chair
Robert Ratcheson
Warren Neyenhuis
Jennifer De Groot

Dear Trustees,

We are writing about your recent decision to allow the Missoula County Public Schools to use your community meeting room to conduct HiSET Classes. If you have been reading the local newspaper you know Missoula County Public Schools was awarded all of the State and Federal Funding that in past years came to our Ravalli County HiSet Program, Literacy Bitterroot. This happen because OPI decided to "consolidate" funding along MACO District lines this year. This decision took half of Literacy Bitterroot's budget. Many members of the public in Ravalli County, including Bitterroot College officials have voiced concern. All five County Commissioners have registered a protest and are attempting to get the funding returned next year. OPI has stated the funds will be returned only if Missoula does not offer services for the Bitterroot. OPI refused to explain how they defined "services," even after a demand by all Five Ravalli County Commissioners. Thus your offer of this room may enable Missoula Public School to retain the grant and take our HiSET services permanently out of local control. Our county has already lost the Economic Development funding, the Job Service Office and possibly Vocational Rehabilitation to Missoula. We were also refused local control of our Community College. Past experience demonstrates the actually funds expended to service the Bitterroot always decreases when this happens.

In this instance, officials from Missoula County Public Schools have stated at public meetings that they have budgeted 1000 hours for Ravalli County at \$28 per hour. That multiplies to a total budget of \$28,000 for the Bitterroot. That is less than half of the state funding received by Ravalli County in the past.

We are informed the Library had decided against meeting with officials of the Bitterroot College to discuss this issue stating the Library Policy is "neutral".

You are not a separate and neutral country like Switzerland. The Bitterroot Public Library is part of the fabric of the local community. Yet you have interpreted your policy in a manner that jeopardizes the fabric of our community and gives control to Missoula.

Moreover, members of the local community are bewildered and angry over your decision in view of the fact this library evicted the Literacy Bitterroot years ago. Your staff claimed there was no room at the library for them. Now you have allowed the Missoula Program to regularly occupy your community meeting room on the

very same evening Literacy Bitterroot teaches classes at Bitterroot College. When Literacy Bitterroot was ordered to leave the Library it almost went under. Our local HiSET Program was only saved because two Family Foundations stepped forward to provide funding until it found its feet again.

Why is the Library now welcoming the Missoula Program when it evicted the local Program? All the reasons we have heard so far sound like a distinction without a difference.

Your "Neutrality" sounds like the wife who picks up a bottle of scotch every day because her husband requests it. She claims purity because she is not the one drinking. But everyone knows she is "enabling". That is exactly what your interpretation of your policy will do. It will enable Missoula to keep the grant.

Please reconsider your policy in a manner that is less harmful to your local community.

Terry Ryan
Managing Director
The Rob & Terry Foundation

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BITTERROOT COURSE DIRECTOR

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Chairman, Hamilton School Board

Jeff Barman
Ravalli County Commissioner

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RAVALLI COUNTY COMMISSIONER

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Senator D. A. Caswell
SD83
Hamilton City Council
ward 2

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Rep. HD-88
Flower.

Chris Hoffman
Ravalli County Commissioner

Deanna Blocker
Deputy Juvenile
Probation Officer

Jim & Sherry
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Montana Hotel Director

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Managing Director
The Rob and Terry Ryan Foundation

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Ronald Ehli
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Nancy Balance
State Representative HD87
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