

11/7/2017

To Terry Ryan, Victoria Clark, and additional signatories of letter of concern dated 11/2/2017:

While we deeply sympathize with the concerns regarding the loss of funding for Literacy Bitterroot as a result of decisions made at the Office of Public Instruction, as noted in a letter of concern addressed to the library board of trustees on November 2, 2017, there were several inaccuracies and misrepresentations of the facts that are of concern to us.

The statement that "the Library decided against meeting with officials of the Bitterroot College to discuss the issue" is incorrect. The library director, Mark Wetherington, met for approximately one hour on Tuesday, October 24th, with Victoria Clark, director of Bitterroot College, and a Bitterroot College faculty member. The topic of discussion was adult education in Ravalli County and the concerns of the college were noted. After the meeting, they were provided with a copy of the community room policy via e-mail and the library's intent to abide by its policy was made clear. As a public institution, the library is legally and ethically obligated to follow its policies.


In an e-mail sent to Victoria Clark on Thursday, October 26th, Mark Wetherington said he "would be happy to schedule a special board meeting" after receiving the college's written concerns. Since the topic had already been discussed at length and in generalities earlier in the week, it seemed appropriate to move forward with future meetings based on specific and written concerns about the library's community room policy. It was also suggested to the college that if their concerns were about funding for literacy programs in Ravalli County, which the library has no role in deciding, that the college contact the Office of Public Instruction.

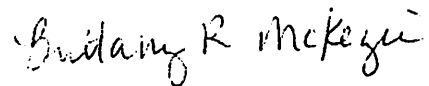
Additionally, the statement that the library "evicted Literacy Bitterroot years ago" severely misrepresents the facts. Literacy Bitterroot (formerly Literacy Volunteers of America) began as a library-based program in 1987 and was located at the Bitterroot Public Library. An agreement in 1992 continued the relationship between the library and Literacy Bitterroot for another decade. In June 2001, the library gave notice to Literacy Bitterroot that the library could no longer provide space after June 30, 2002 as result of the program's growth beyond the capacity of the library to accommodate it. This notice gave Literacy Bitterroot an entire year to find another location. Furthermore, the library agreed to make the meeting room available for tutor training and GED testing and would give preference to Literacy Bitterroot when scheduling the room. Documents regarding this history are on file at the library and include a Statement of Understanding from 2001 that was signed by the library and Literacy Bitterroot.

The library has interpreted its policy as equitably as possible. The library did not create the funding issues for Literacy Bitterroot and is not an agency that is able to solve them. According to Dixie Stark, executive director of Literacy Bitterroot, the funding issue is a result of "a bureaucratic decision at the OPI [Office of Public Instruction]" as noted in a recent Ravalli Republic article. The local library is not the appropriate channel through which to try and change decisions made at the state level.

The library regularly reviews its policies to ensure that they are legal, ethical, and can meet the needs of a growing community. **A special board meeting, open to the public, to discuss the concerns of the community will be held on Tuesday, November 14th, from 4-5:30 p.m. in the meeting room of the library.** If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the library director at 406-363-1670 or stop by the library at 306 State Street in Hamilton.


Mark Wetherington
Library Director


Nikki McConnell
Chair, Board of Trustees


Brittany McKenzie
Vice-chair, Board of Trustees

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Ravalli County Commissioners

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