

Wisconsin School and Library Budgets, Already Facing Significant Cuts, Now at Risk of Increased Costs.

Late Friday June 3rd, 2011, the [Omnibus University of Wisconsin System motion \(489\)](#) passed in the Joint Finance Committee. This motion contained points specifically crafted to limit the advanced networking capabilities of the University of Wisconsin System (UWS).

- The motion explicitly denies UWS the ability to utilize a total of approximately \$51 million in federal stimulus grant and matching funds.
- It explicitly prohibits UWS from being a member of or partner with WiscNet, a non-profit networking services co-op with many K12 schools, technical colleges, private colleges, public libraries, and other public institutions as cooperative members.
- UWS is the largest member of WiscNet. Preventing it from being a member would be devastating to the general cooperative, likely decreasing the ability of WiscNet to continue operations.
- All members will be affected by the prevention of UWS from WiscNet membership.
- Libraries in Central Wisconsin (34 connected libraries and branches all members of the same library system), have an average cost of approximately \$450 per year for Internet bandwidth. According to the pricing model of one alternative option under State contract, this average would increase to approximately \$1,100 per year.
- For some of the smaller rural libraries, that increase represents 2.5% to 3% of their entire annual budget.
- 95% of over 430 libraries and branches will see similar increases. 80% of schools will be subject to the same experience.

While the telecommunications industry stands to gain a little from this legislation, schools, libraries, colleges, students, and taxpayers stand to lose a lot. Maintaining same service levels with alternative Internet Service Providers (ISPs) will cost as much as 250% more and some best case scenarios show a minimum of 90% more in ISP costs. The general comments from the legislators sponsoring and/or supporting the amendments indicate a lack of foresight into the broad reaching negative impact this decision will have on the State of Wisconsin and ultimately its taxpayers.

Most libraries in Central Wisconsin and throughout the rest of the state are already anticipating a reduction in 2012 budgets due to state budget provisions which cut shared revenue to counties and municipalities. This, along with elimination of maintenance of the effort requirement under public library law designed to keep the funding picture stable make it more difficult for libraries to balance their budgets. The amendments in Omnibus Motion 489 will add costs on top of that. Not only will costs for some services go up, but costs for future broadband growth will be so prohibitive as to curtail services. Under WiscNet's unlimited bandwidth pricing model, each member pays one flat price period, no matter how much growth they experience in the future.

It may also mean that many libraries throughout the state, already struggling to balance budgets, will actually have to decrease the level of their public Internet services in the coming years. Many rural libraries, currently underserved by a lack of affordable high speed broadband options, and already at minimum service levels, could face disconnection from cooperative services altogether.