



PO Box 201800 1515 East 6th Avenue Helena, MT 59620 (406) 444-3115

Memo

To: Montana State Library Commission

From: Jennie Stapp, State Librarian

Date: April 12, 2022

Re: ImagineIf Libraries Comments

The State Library received the following comments regarding the ImagineIf Libraries. Comments are shared with the knowledge of the commentors.

To the Montana State Library Commissioners:

My name is Ann Brooks. I have lived in Flathead County for over 30 years and I have worked for the ImagineIF Library system since 2001. Recently I heard that some of Flathead County's ImagineIF Library Trustees are going to attend your next meeting. I am unable to attend, but I would like to also weigh in as both a member of the public and as an ImagineIF staff member. I wish to state that I support the Montana State Library's decision to uphold the requirement of having a library director hold a Master's of Library Science Degree (or its equivalent). The State has been very helpful and clear during every step of the hiring process for our new director. I am very disappointed that three of the ImagineIF Library Trustees failed to understand or believe what the State had so clearly been saying since last August.

Regardless of her education, I really do hope the library's new director, Ashley Cummings, will be a fantastic director. All the promise I personally feel for the new director does not alter the fact that the ImagineIF "Trustees", who voted to hire regardless of the state's MLS degree requirement, put their own personal agendas ahead of what, at its most basic level, would clearly be, at a minimum, *financially* best for the library during the hiring process. They put Ashley in her current awkward position. Those trustees should take responsibility for their decisions and explain themselves to the public, the library staff, and the county commissioners. Those trustees should not be wasting the county commissioners' time by having the commissioners write you letters of appeal. Those trustees should not be wasting time in their own meetings, holding special meetings, or in your meetings, acting surprised about budget shortfalls they themselves willfully created eight months ago.

Thanks for letting me say my piece and for holding all our libraries to a high standard. It has been my pleasure to continue my own education by taking Montana State Library Continuing Education Classes for the last 21 years, during which time I have been certified five times. You do truly walk the talk. Growth mindset matters. Education matters.

Sincerely,
Ann Brooks
BS in Physics
Library Advisor

Dear Ms. Lighthouses,

I am a concerned resident in Flathead County. I want you and the Montana State Library Commission to know that I am thoroughly disgusted with the behavior of three of our Library Trustees. It is so frustrating that they hired an unqualified Library Director, knowing that this would result in our Library losing funding. The fact that they had the nerve to contact you to try to get their own way. Please, don't give into them. Our community does not support the Board of Trustees actions. They are also making controversial decisions to ban books, censorship, and refusal to purchase books(ie. LGBTQ topics)

They need to take responsibility for their actions and accept the consequences.

Your decisions in this matter will set precedents for future issues throughout the state.

Please be strong and don't give in to the Imagine If Library Trustees.

Thank you,
Maureen Louden

Dear Ms. Lighthiser,

I am a patron of the Kalispell Imaginelf Library. I treasure our library and our amazingly helpful, supportive staff.

As you know, our library trustees recently hired an educationally unqualified individual to be the director of our library. I do not support their decision to disregard State standards.

They made this decision knowing we would lose State funding. Our trustees now wish to petition the State to fund our library, regardless of their callous disregard for educational standards for library directors.

If our library trustees secure the votes to petition the State for funding, I implore you to decline their request.

Funding would remove the consequence for their decision. A decision made with full knowledge of loss of funding should they hire an unqualified candidate. Funding would also undermine the standards in place for all Montana libraries.

My letter to our Kalispell Imaginelf Library Trustees follows. Based on their responsibility for their decision, I requested they not petition the State. I will attend the meeting tonight when they vote to petition.

If they do petition for funding, please allow them to stand in the consequence of their decision, to take full responsibility for it.

Please do not provide State funding for our wonderful library and staff.

There must be consequences for the decisions our leaders make. And there must be respect for standards and State laws.

Thank you for your consideration.

A dedicated library patron,

Dee de Yong
99 Riverside Road
Kalispell, MT. 59901

From: Thomas Carlson <406tcarlson@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, February 14, 2022 9:15 PM
To: Stapp, Jennie <JStapp2@mt.gov>
Cc: Kris Carlson <406carlson@gmail.com>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Imagine if library

Dear Ms Stapp,

We are writing regarding your decision to withhold funding for our Imagine IF library.

My wife and I have enjoyed our library regularly since moving home to our native state and the Flathead 28 years ago.

Thank you for holding our county accountable to national standards. Politics have prevailed over professionalism. We and all the people we have talked to who use our fine library want a certified librarian and library to maintain excellence and professionalism.

If you relent and accept Flathead's claim of hardship for lack of professional leadership, our library and likely other county sponsored professional roles will suffer from lower standards and diminished services.

Thank you for your service to our state.
Sincerely,
Kris and Tom Carlson

Sent from Tom c

From: Glacier Sound <glaciersound7@gmail.com>
Date: Fri, Apr 1, 2022 at 7:30 AM
Subject: Kalispell library
To: <glighthiser@gmail.com>

To the Montana State Library Commission,

I have recently heard that the trustees of the Kalispell Imagine If Library are voting to petition your commission to reinstate the funding, I do not want to see libraries their funding. I also do not want to see one or two people on library boards have the power to take books off the shelves and to toe the public what is good for them to read. The behavior of Doug Adams and his board has been appalling. And embarrassing. So even though I do not want to see libraries lose their funding, I do not want to see these people be successful in petitioning money from you. They knew the consequences of their choices and went ahead and did it anyway, in my opinion they should be spanked and sent to bed without their supper.

I have written the same to them.

Please stand your ground. The alternative is for the board to hire a qualified librarian.

Most sincerely,
Mary McGrath
Citizen of the Flathead Valley, Columbia Falls MT

From: Randy Beach <drbeach@bresnan.net>
Sent: Sunday, February 20, 2022 11:48 AM
To: Stapp, Jennie <JStapp2@mt.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] ImagineIF Library

Dear Ms. Stapp,
Thank you very much for upholding the Montana State Library Standards in the case of ImagineIF library in Kalispell. The library has been under siege from inappropriate interference from the library board. It is appalling that Ashley Cummins was selected to be the library director. A library serving a population as large as ImagineIF serves needs to have an appropriately credentialed and experienced director. Ms. Cummins is not even close to meeting those criteria with her credentials. It is really sad that some of

their board members have devalued the library to such an extent. My family and I appreciate your hard work and consistency. The library has been a great asset to our community.

Sincerely,
Anita Beach

From: Jim Nelson <nelson.james.r@gmail.com>

Sent: Tuesday, February 15, 2022 3:27 PM

To: Stapp, Jennie <JStapp2@mt.gov>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Thank you from this Flathead County Library supporter

Attn: Jennie Stapp, MT State Librarian

Jennie, thank you in advance for accepting and reading my email. I know that you have much to do on your plate these days.

As background, I have been early in providing direct comments to Flathead County commissioners and the Library Trustees. I have not used editorials, letters to the editor or public forums for my comments. I'll share that my wife and I are significant donors and supporters of the development of the planned \$1.6 million Bigfork Library project, a new privately-funded comprehensive 6,000 sq foot facility designed to replace the current outdated 1,400 sq foot location.

Relative to this new project, in opposition to earlier commitments, Flathead County Commissioners have suggested that they may not accept this donated facility into its supervision, supposedly because the county would be responsible for the ongoing maintenance expenses. I have this image of somebody being given a free automobile and complaining about being responsible for the oil changes.

Though I have spent the bulk of my career in finance, by academic training I have an MS degree in Counseling Psychology with a focus on Early Child Development. Of particular interest are the topics of early brain and literacy development in the "zero to five" age group. I am an advisor to the University of Wisconsin Child Development Lab School, a nearly 100-year old research-based lab school that emerged, like many other lab schools, from the Land Grant University programs of the early 1900s. Incidentally, one of our best faculty members is an MD Pediatrician with an MSL degree and dual professorship appointments with the UW Medical School and CDL. He is an amazing library system advocate.

Two items of focus in my email: 1) Flathead County Library accreditation and 2) Anecdotal comments that may or may not be of particular import in your accreditation review.

Flathead County Library Accreditation

Relative to our county library, thank you for your decision to support the stated standards for accreditation and financial support. In an earlier email addressed to me, one of the commissioners was quite confident that you would accept the "averaging" of credentials to support accreditation as well as provision of funding. I suspect that you may, if not already, receive some significant pressure to amend or reverse your decision. The proposal for "dilution" of credentialing arguments by our local leadership is flawed. They posit that "on average" the Flathead staff meets the MLS leadership definition. Imagine

a medical clinic saying that "on average" they have a qualified surgical team. Or, a fire department including the dalmatian as part of the crew head-count. I know this is a comical statement, but the State's external feedback on accreditation standards, particularly at this very important point in time, is a vital reality-testing message to send to this library system and community. Jennie, your leadership sends an important message. Please hang-in there by avoiding any dilution of your decision. You stand on very firm ground. Please stay engaged.

Anecdotal comments

I'm quite sure that the new hire is probably a very nice person with a real commitment to community library systems. I'm equally sure that the reduction of scope/benefits guidance, provided for the executive search firm, severely reduced the potential stable of interested candidates. Between the lines, the message was pretty clear that "good enough" was the order of the day. The new hire comes from a small Alabama town of roughly 10,000 with a library circulation of 25,000. There is one single facility with two employees and one volunteer. The new hire is one of the two employees. The library is closed Sunday-Monday, is open from 10am-5pm Tuesday-Friday and has Saturday hours from 10am-2pm. The new hire does not yet have a bachelor's degree while she states that she is working toward her MLS. Her recent pay was raised from \$12.50 to \$13.50 per hour and is now a hiree with a new salary of \$75,000 annually. She has outwardly expressed an aversion for participating in fund-raising and development efforts which are of extreme import to our library system. I have a very difficult time envisioning her working with the broad array of modern library system constituencies that include, among others, the Flathead Valley Community College, our local hospitals, school districts, veterans groups, senior citizen groups, corporations, job-seekers, professional library associations and others. This outreach requires executive level organization and administrative skills and projection of professional credibility. The challenges just became even more difficult with this week's resignation of the Director of the ImagineIF Library Foundation, a critical life-line for our library system.

I'll end here by repeating my thanks for your engagement in the process. Thank you once again for considering my thoughts on this topic. I hope to meet you sometime in the future.

Best regards,

Jim Nelson

Bigfork, MT

2-15-22

Open letter to the Montana State Library Commission:

At your April meeting you will be addressing credentialing for the ImagineIF library in Kalispell. At issue will be a waiver for state funding and certification of the library involving the hiring of an unqualified library director. I recommend your denial of the waiver. Here's why:

Russellville Public Library in Alabama is a tiny, store-front library with only one other full-time employee other than the director. It is run chiefly by volunteers. It is not even open forty hours a week.

ImagineIF, in great contrast, is a state-recognized leader in library innovation, world-class service, numerous trained staff members, expansive hours and diverse collections. The library director's job is extremely complex. An MLS degree is the bare minimum necessary to address the role that this library plays on the broad community and state-wide arena.

It is beyond belief that the Flathead County library trustees would consider hiring an individual who only holds a high school diploma for a director. Further, it is not enough that the recently hired director came to her current position in Alabama "accidentally" and is "working toward" a bachelor's degree and "hopes to get" an MLS degree. In any event, the state standards for library credentialing are clear: an MLS degree is required to be considered for state funding and certification and anything short of that is woeful neglect on the part of the library trustees.

I recently send an email to each of the Flathead County Commissioners asking them to remove those library trustees who appear to have failed in their public duty to secure a suitable and qualified director for ImagineIF Library. That the trustees have not found such a candidate, after exhaustive searches, is a problem of their own making, having driven off the previous very capable library directors because of internal micromanaging on behalf of the trustees that has led to distrust, low morale and rancor. It should surprise no one that many qualified applicants in the pool for this highly prized opening have withdrawn from consideration. Word is out. It is a troubled library and many in the Flathead are deeply upset about that.

In my email, I asked the county commissioners, hypothetically, if they would sanction the hiring of a deputy county attorney if he/she did not hold a law degree. Similarly, I asked them if they would support the hiring of a civil engineer in the road department if he/she did not hold an engineer's degree from an accredited university and who had not passed the FE (Fundamentals of Engineering) national exam. I then asked them, at the Sheriff's Department level, if they would authorize the hiring of an officer who had not graduated from MLEA (Montana Law Enforcement Academy) whose state standards, POST (Police Officer Standards Training), are no less strict than those in our library world. Our local library is a county department deserving of equal credibility. And the request for a "waiver" of credentialing for the director is a bold affront to the State Library, the Commission and all professional librarians.

As a post note, I only received a brief "Thanks for your input" reply from one of the three County Commissioners.

I worked hard for my MLS degree. I incurred significant school debts to earn it. I share the honor of it with no person as an "equivalency" any more than other certified librarians at ImagineIF library should. To ask them to work for a director with only a high school diploma is unthinkable.

I therefore urge the State Library Commission to reject any request from the Flathead County Commissioners for a "waiver" of state standards. If we, as a library community, ignore our own standards then we have walked away from our dignity and our professionalism and our honor. The standards are codified and must not be sullied or otherwise tarnished by those wishing to fulfil their own agendas. We must always strive to set a high bar for ourselves—and achieve it. The state standards demand that. Or, as the saying goes: "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for."

Michael J. Ober MA, MLS

Professor Emeritus, Flathead Valley Community College
54 Buffalo Hill Drive
Kalispell, MT 59901
406-890-9472 Cell
406-257-2040
michaelober209@gmail.com

I am not able to attend the upcoming meeting in Helena. Please accept my comments via email.

State Library standards should/must be upheld.

ImagineIF Trustees actions are part of broader patterns endangering other funding and community trust. The Trustees must be held accountable and responsible.

State standards call for the director to hold a Master's degree in Library Science. The candidate hired is only a high school graduate.

The Trustees were told repeatedly before the hiring of the new director that they risked losing State certification and financial support if they proceeded.

Flathead residents expect and need to have their public library provide top-of-the-class services, not just adequate.

The ImagineIF library is now short of its previous complement of well-trained, degreed librarians, who have the skills to run a large, forward-thinking system.

Sincerely,
Sharon Vonk
2888 Swan Hwy, Bigfork, MT 59911
sharonvonk@gmail.com

Dear Ms. Lighthiser,

The ImagineIF Library Trustees from Kalispell will be meeting with the State Library Commission on April 13th. Many of us in Kalispell are appalled that these trustees hired a director who does not even come close to meeting the state standards which call for the director to hold a Master's degree in Library Science. The candidate hired is currently working on her undergraduate degree. We have been so proud of our library as it has evolved to ImagineIF. It is a stellar part of our community and to have the board, with its own agenda, downplay the importance of state standards is disgraceful! They knew at the time they hired the new director they would be risking state funding, and still they proceeded to hire an unqualified candidate. It is tragic to lose state funding, but this board needs to follow state rules and guidelines and needs to provide the ImagineIF Library with a qualified director/librarian.

Sincerely,
Lynn & Gary Havens

205 Woodland Ave.
Kalispell, MT 59901
Cell: 406-212-1619
Land: 406-257-6614
lhavens@montanasky.net

As a lifelong resident of the Flathead valley, I wanted to write and share my feelings about the leadership of the Imaginelf Kalispell public library board of trustees. The recent decisions made by our library trustee members have been very concerning. (Doug Adams, Roedel, and Ingram.) They are trying to circumvent rules in order to achieve their own political agendas. They do not care about long established qualifications regarding staffing a library director. They try and justify the decision by saying the library has others working in the building that have a masters degree, so the director doesn't need one. Can you imagine this logic being applied to other fields of study? A teacher doesn't need a degree because other teachers in the building have one? The new director doesn't even have a college degree yet, let alone a masters degree. There are rules in place for reasons. Do not let our library board of trustees circumvent the rules. They made the foolish decision and they must now deal with the consequences.

Thank you for your consideration.

Dana Grove

[I cannot travel to the meeting, but here is a heartfelt letter.]

I have a degree in library science from the Univ. of Illinois and though never employed at the public library in Kalispell, I worked there as a volunteer in the 1990's, for about ten years.

It was a friendly, peaceful place in those days. I don't recall anyone on staff or library board lecturing others or trying to push their own views.

And before that my family enjoyed fifteen or more summers of membership in the Flathead Library. Every week or so, we took a big cardboard box of reading up to our cabin, with no worries about our sons being captured by dangerous ideas.

Suppression of choice by a County Library Board of Trustees is shocking to one who remembers too well the intolerance of Europe in the years of WW2. In my girlhood, I witnessed what happens when Ideas are shoved under the rug. I saw that petty control of information and discussion is an early stage of tyranny.

Maybe the county should stock up on works that describe how creativity and freedom can be lost by allowing someone to decide what we shall read—or not read..

Cecily R. McNeil
crmneil@mac.com

The ImagineIF Library is a major resource for us and the community. We have volunteered and supported Friends of the Library for years. The ImagineIF Library programs, resources and staff are exceptional.

All libraries need funding. We appreciate the advantages of State Library funding and believe in meeting requirements to obtain the funding. If the Library Board knowingly hired a director without an MLS degree, they were aware there would be a loss of state funding. Several members of the current library board have stated publicly that they would like to remove ALA standards and rewrite the library policies that govern book purchases and book removals. This is beyond their authority and unacceptable. Multiple resignations of staff and foundation members reveals that something is obviously wrong.

We have phoned, emailed the County Commissioners and Library Board, attended library board meetings, written letters to newspaper editors, and will continue to do so. We are glad that local newspapers report the library news. We appreciate the support from the State Library and ACLU. We need library board members who are library advocates.

Wendy & Mike Lauman

mwlauman@montanasky.us
406 471 7139

It's too bad we ran good employees and candidates off because of the board. Make it right!

- State Library standards should/must be upheld.
- ImagineIF Trustees actions are part of broader patterns endangering other funding and community trust. The Trustees must be held accountable and responsible.
- State standards call for the director to hold a Master's degree in Library Science. The candidate hired is only a high school graduate.
- The Trustees were told repeatedly before the hiring of the new director that they risked losing State certification and financial support if they proceeded.
- Flathead residents expect and need to have their public library provide top-of-the-class services, not just adequate.
- The ImagineIF library is now short of its previous complement of well-trained, degreed librarians, who have the skills to run a large, forward-thinking system.

Penny Sevaly
gopenster@gmail.com

Thank you Montana State Library Commission for your good work.

I would like to share that Imagine IF Flathead County Libraries are in swift decline from recent years and need your mediation and leadership. They serve a quickly growing community with dwindling resources with very little support and leadership at the local governance level.

I totally agree with your declining the funding of the unqualified Director appointment, of which I hope will be refilled correctly for the library community to thrive again. The aggregate knowledge of trustees on how libraries operate using established resources is less than effective currently.

It is a given that when library trustees are appointed they know and accept their "love of libraries" leadership position on behalf of the whole community. It is established that this board of trustees, in aggregate, do not demonstrate their leadership role because they appointed an unqualified candidate for director. As a community member and taxpayer I demand a fully qualified candidate.

Warmly,

Ruth Barefoot

"Do what you can, with what you have, where you are." Teddy Roosevelt

ruthbarefoot@gmail.com

Dear Commissioners:

I am a citizen of Kalispell and a user of the "Imagine If" Library. I spent many of my working years in Washington, D.C. working as a economist at the Congressional Research Service located in the Library of Congress. I became well acquainted with the value of a great library for both professional and recreational purposes. In my 17 years of residence in Kalispell I have learned to appreciate our public library as a great resource with a staff that knows how to provide resources to readers whether or not the requested books are in English or another language and whether they are locally available or not.

Until recently, that is! Our county commissioners have unwisely appointed people to the library's Board of Trustees who are not interested in maintaining a fine library but rather in a "conservative" political agenda that has created nothing but unnecessary strife in the community, driven away successful library managers and appointed a new director of our library who has no professional qualifications as a librarian and little experience as a manager. As a result of this mistake, our library's funding from the state has been cut.

This unhappy situation results from a partisan conflict in an area of public services in which political partisanship is inappropriate. If the consequence of our trustees hiring decision is appealed to you, please desist from intervening by waving your well considered regulations and suggest that our trustees reconsider their direction or that our county commissioners appoint better qualified trustees.

William Cox

501 4th Avenue East

Kalispell

billcox3@bresnan.net

To: State Library Board

From: Bill and Sarah Dakin, Bigfork, MT.

Re: Imaginelf Flathead library issues

Many of us lifelong Flathead Valley residents are aghast at the local situation. We have been SO PROUD of this institution and the remarkable people who have nurtured and elevated it for generations.

Now, it is under attack by what appears to be an anti-intellectual, authoritarian "culture war" minority wherein self-appointed guardians of public decency want to exert their vision for the institution and make determinations for all the people of what is and what is not suitable for the library's shelves. Heaven help us if even libraries become arenas for political or religious agendas, Censorship begins here. Freedom gets battered.

News coverage has taught us a great deal about the state library system, its function and its importance. Thank you for being there. Thank you for upholding professional credentials and standards. Thank you for standing for free expression and unbridled access.

The impact on Imaginelf's state funding is the known-and-chosen handiwork of these zealots, driven by a national anti-library movement. That they mask their agenda in the cloak of fiscal considerations is exposed for its phoniness.

Now, they come to you for relief for their own disregard for/ abhorrence of professional standards. As much as it appalls us to see the fiscal impact on the library, no consideration is merited for relief of their self-inflicted wound.

These three trustees' self-appointed imperious tactics cannot be without consequence. We hope you do not "excuse" it by making any exceptions to your important and appropriate requirements and accreditation standards.

Sincerely,

Bill and Sarah Dakin
dakinwilliam@yahoo.com

April 9, 2022
Dear Montana State Library Commissioners,

I am a resident of Columbia Falls and Flathead County and an active user of the ImagineIF Library. For the past 12 years, I have worked as a national library consultant, serving over 200 libraries in 35 states, in the areas of strategic planning, fundraising, and board development.

I want to express my gratitude the State Library staff for the creation and maintenance of State Library Standards. I believe these standards have significantly contributed to the excellent quality of public libraries across Montana, with numerous library leaders nationally.

However, for the ImagineIF Library, I am deeply disturbed by the recent actions of our Library Trustees, particularly 3 of the 5 Trustees, and want to encourage you to maintain state standards for the ImagineIF Library. Failure to do so can only lead to further inappropriate actions by the Trustees, resulting in disintegration of public library services for Flathead residents. The current problem at ImagineIF is irresponsible management by the Board – **not** state standards.

Let me elaborate further. The ImagineIF Trustees, by a three to two vote, recently appointed a new library director. The person chosen only holds a high school diploma, and does not have an undergraduate degree, let alone the MLS degree required by state standards. While not holding a library degree may be appropriate for smaller libraries, ImagineIF is the 4th largest system in the state with 4 branches. It now serves the fastest growing population in the state. with over 100,000 residents and growing explosively at 3-4% annually.

The new director also does not have equivalent experience to hold the director position at ImagineIF. She was the director of a much smaller library in Alabama, such that the circulation of children's books and materials at her previous library was 1% of ImagineIF's, the budget was 3%, and there were only 2 staff (ImagineIF has 28). This is of deep concern.

Equally troubling are the overall actions of our Trustees. Against the advice of both the County HR department and the executive search consultant, they decreased the director salary by \$15,000 at a time when costs are skyrocketing locally, causing numerous qualified candidates to remove themselves from the process. The Board hired the new person with full knowledge that it would mean decertification and loss of funding by the state. Two of the Trustees voted against the new hire, and two others have documented communications where they stated that the candidate – now director – did not have adequate qualifications. Previously, Trustee actions were primary factors in driving away both the previous director and interim director, as well as a children's librarian – all of whom held MLS degrees – as well as an accomplished Foundation director.

These actions, as well as other statements, decisions, and directions, including fostering extremist censorship challenges and violating open meeting laws, have demoralized staff, meant an overall reduction of 2 MLS degreed positions, and seriously eroded the trust of a large segment of the community. The actions are part of a pattern by three of the Trustees of willfully ignoring public library best practices, maintenance of standards, broad-based community input and needs, and expert advice.

It is critical that you, as State Library Commissioners, have a broader understanding of the context and actions of this Imaginelf board. Their decisions are endangering other funding and support for our library and threatening the outstanding and diversified library service we have enjoyed. Offering a waiver or deferment of state standards would only serve to further exacerbate the negative situation directly caused by three Trustees with the support of the County Commissioners.

Please help us locally by sending a strong message to both our Board and County Commissioners that state library standards will be upheld and that they need to be accountable and responsible for their own misdeeds and irresponsible decisions.

Thank you for your time, work and support.

Sincerely,
Stu Wilson
91 Cedar Point Loop, Columbia Falls, MT
sjwilson2@live.com
651.253.3231

To the Montana State Library Commission,

I oppose relaxing the requirement that a qualified, credentialed librarian fill the position of director of the imaginelf library system. The current hire was made following the Flathead County Library Board's reduction of the director's starting salary amid rising inflation, the county's adding a COLA raise plus another 4% raise to all county employees, and a tight, expensive housing market. The Board does not need to be rewarded for its economic short-sightedness.

The real solutions lie with the Board working with Flathead County residents and elected officials to address needed library resources and facilities given the county's c. 15% growth rate. Had the Board knowingly hired an experienced business or management person, the loss of about \$35,000 may well have been worth foregoing state funding, if it substantially improved operation of the Flathead County library system.

I look forward to Flathead County renewing its high caliber library services with qualified, capable staff; adequate, accessible facilities; and programming for all ages. Meanwhile, until such time as its director meets state standards, it is appropriate that it not receive the state funding in question.

Margaret S Davis, PO Box 788, Lakeside MT 59922
blems@aol.com

Greetings Montana Library Commissioners:

I write to urge all commission members to deny any and all petitions by the ImagineIF Trustees for a waiver of standards for the new library director, Ashley Cummins. Here is why:

- State library standards are firm and codified in the Administrative Rules of the MCA.
- Any "waivers" to the standard may imply that rules and regulations can be modified and may there be interpreted by other libraries as an opportunity to petition correspondingly and may result in future legal action against the Commission.
- ImagineIF trustees are shamelessly seeking a resolution to a crisis of their own making, having driven off previous directors and other library employees with their meddling and micromanagement in daily library operations. That they cannot find a qualified candidate for director with an ALA certified MLS should surprise no one in our profession. Word is out. ImagineIF is a troubled library in need of better leadership.
- Any college credits toward a BA or BS degree submitted by Ms. Cummins are inconsequential unless it leads to an actual degree and, even then, that falls far too short of a MLS degree usually requiring 45-60 credits of graduate level work.
- It matters not one bit that Ms. Cummins may hold some sort of "certification" from Idaho or Alabama or any other state for that matter. Montana is governed by our own standards.

In your meeting, it may be well to ask ImagineIF trustees if they thought it would be prudent to ask the Flathead County Commissioners to approve the hiring of a civil engineer for the county planning office who did not have an engineering degree from an accredited university. Or, if they felt a "waiver" would be just OK for the hiring of a sheriff deputy who had not graduated from MLEA (Montana Law Enforcement Academy) and was POST (Peace Officers Standard Training) certified. Or, if they would support the hiring of a deputy county attorney who had not graduated from law school. Our professional library standards must not be sullied or dismissed by those bent on changing the rules in a flawed attempt to secure state funding.

Finally, I worked hard for my MLS degree and incurred significant debts to earn it. I share it as an "equivalency" with no person.

Thanks for the opportunity to submit my comments on this critical issue facing the Commission.

Michael J. Ober
Professor Emeritus, Flathead Valley Community College
michaelober209@gmail.com
54 Buffalo Hill Drive
Kalispell, MT 59901
406-257-2040 home

406-890-9472 cell

Dear Ms. Lighthiser,

The ImagineIF libraries in the Flathead Valley are very important to our citizens and communities. Residents of our Valley deserve and expect our libraries to be staffed with well educated librarians who have the skills to run a growing system, who are trained to provide services needed today with an eye to the needs of the future. Right now, the ImagineIF library is short of well-trained degreed librarians.

The current Trustees were told several times during the hiring process they needed to find a director who met State Library Standards or else risk losing financial support. Those standards call for a director to hold a Master's degree in Library Science. Our niece earned her Master's and it took six years of education.. There was no excuse for them to hire someone with a high school education who in no way has the knowledge of someone with an advanced degree. When they struggled to get applicants because the salary for the position was too low and because applicants could read about the current toxic environment, rather than petitioning the County for additional funds or stepping back to assess their behavior, they lowered the bar.

We believe the State's standards must be upheld to ensure the ImagineIF libraries maintain quality service. The Trustees action in knowingly hiring an unqualified Director is part of a broader pattern of control that has created a negative environment for the remaining staff. Some members want to remove all American Library Association language from ImagineIFs policy claiming it is too liberal. By removing the ALA language, they can micro-manage the library staff by approving book purchase lists , removing critical reviews, and banning certain books. The ACLU is already looking into the Trustees expressed desire to ban certain books.

We know they knew what they were doing when they hired a director with only a high school education. They assumed they could bully the State Library Commission into accepting their decision. We believe they should be held accountable!

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Garner
652 Coyote Meadow Trail
Kalispell, Montana 59901
mary.garner@comcast.net

As a community member and long time supporter of the library system , I take issue with recent actions of the trustees re: their decision to hire a director who doesn't meet state standards - which is resulting in the loss of state certification and funding.

Strongly oppose their decision for the following reasons :

- State Library standards must be upheld.
- ImagineIF Trustees actions are part of broader patterns endangering other funding and community trust. The Trustees must be held accountable and responsible.
- State standards call for the director to hold a Master's degree in Library Science. The candidate hired is only a high school graduate.
- The Trustees were told repeatedly before the hiring of the new director that they risked losing State certification and financial support if they proceeded.
- Flathead residents expect and need to have their public library provide top-of-the-class services, not just adequate.
- The ImagineIF library is now short of its previous complement of well-trained, degreed librarians, who have the skills to run a large, forward-thinking

We need and deserve a strong public library. The Trustees are violating the public trust.

Dana Longstreth
Whitefish
dlongstreth@wisc.edu

MT State Library Commission Meeting

Please allow me to comment that I fully support the Flathead Library Alliance. I am appalled by the current library's trustee's actions. The library has lost too many of it's professional staff. State library standards must be upheld.

Thank you for allowing me to comment

Janet C. DuBois
Somers, Montana
jandubois@live.com

My comments for the April 13 Library Commission meeting.

1) Having a qualified person in charge of libraries is very important. A high school diploma is not a college masters degree!

2) The ImagineIF trustees are more interested in promoting their political and religious agenda than having a library that professionally run and open to books for the entire community.

3) The Trustees were told repeatedly before the hiring of the new director that they risked losing State certification and financial support if they proceeded. Yet they moved forward with actions that can only damage the library. This does not seem to me to be the actions of individuals that should be trusted with something as important as a public library.

Thank you,
Rich Strong
Bigfork, MT
rpstrong@centurytel.net

My name is Shelley Wagnild and I am a resident of Flathead County. I am writing to express and support the following:

- State Library standards should/must be upheld.
- ImagineIF Trustees actions are part of broader patterns endangering other funding and community trust. The Trustees must be held accountable and responsible.
- State standards call for the director to hold a Master's degree in Library Science. The candidate hired is only a high school graduate.
- The Trustees were told repeatedly before the hiring of the new director that they risked losing State certification and financial support if they proceeded.
- Flathead residents expect and need to have their public library provide top-of-the-class services, not just adequate.
- The ImagineIF library is now short of its previous complement of well-trained, degreed librarians, who have the skills to run a large, forward-thinking system.

Thank you for taking my opinion into consideration.

Shelley Wagnild
P.O. Box 2805
Kalispell, MT 59903
406-270-0023
shelleyd54@aol.com

Hello,

I have been a resident of Kalispell, MT all my life and so sorry and mad to see that this library board is

going down the wrong road and making a drastic mistake in hiring a library director who does not hold the necessary credentials and also does not have the experience of serving in a county of over 30,000 population base.

This candidate does not even have an undergraduate degree and would take another two years for her to attain a Bachelor's Degree and then add on another 2 years to gain a master's Degree in Library Science. This individual is not qualified to be an IF Library Director and by hiring this very unqualified person our library will lose funding which is vital in the operation of its many services to our valley.

The board needs to consider everything in hiring a new director and most importantly is to hire an individual with the necessary credentials and working experiences so we can continue to utilize a library that has worked so hard to attain the status that it has had for so many years.

This IF Library Board is doing serious harm to the residents and they need to reevaluate their position and decisions that are seriously affecting the residents and employees of our IF Library.

Thank you for allowing me to send you this message as I feel very strongly that this IF Library Board is just trying to do a quick fix and not looking at all the ramifications of hiring a QUALIFIED and EXPERIENCED Librarian.

As Always,
Wanita M. (Glover) Smith
rw2000@centurytel.net

Dear Ms. Lighthiser and Members of the Commission,

Please do not degrade the Montana state library standards to mitigate the ineptitude of the ImagineIF Library Board.

Current Montana library standards are reasonable and appropriate. The ImagineIF trustees intentional disregard for these standards is evident and has been well documented. Now the ImagineIF board wants to pretend that the Commission is being unreasonable. Please do not reward or facilitate their efforts.

Thank you.
Susie Burch
Kalispell, MT
superbean835@gmail.com

Dear Ms. Lighthiser,

I am writing to ask that the Montana State Library Commission uphold the standards for requiring a Masters in Library Science for library directors. While I realize that insisting on the standard means that our wonderful ImagineIF library loses out on important funding, I also believe that intentionally and knowingly skirting this important standard should not be rewarded. It could set a dangerous precedent for other library board across the state to undermine our public libraries in the same manner our local Board and Flathead County Commissioners have managed to do in a relatively short amount of time.

Sincerely,
Sally Cameron-Russell
595 Howard Dr
Kalispell, MT 59901
sallycameronrussell@gmail.com

My name is Valeri McGarvey and I live in Kalispell, MT. I would like to give public comment today on the issues surrounding ImagineIF Library System in Flathead County. Up until about a year or so ago, this library was a fully staffed, smooth running, and award-winning library which met all the qualifications to be certified by the Montana State Library. As our current county commissioners began to ignore years of precedent in which pro-library, qualified trustees were appointed, they appointed three members of extreme right, anti-tax, anti-government, and pro-censorship trustees. These trustees, now in the majority, have led to the burn out and resignation of at least five highly qualified and excellent librarians, leaving our beloved library operating with a diminished yet dedicated staff enduring constant chaos created by a board who does not understand board service or governance.

You have received a letter from the county commissioners from Flathead County. I have carefully read this letter, and would like to clarify a few points, as I found this letter to be disingenuous. I have attended every single board meeting held by the board of trustees at ImagineIF since October of 2021. A FOIA request of board emails has shown that three of the board members all but colluded to bring a book challenge to our library in an effort to force the resignation of our interim director. As they began the search for another director, they lowered both the salary and the educational qualifications for the director position. They received 11 candidates who were qualified, but as the book challenge progressed, with a clear intention from a majority of the board to censor books, and as housing costs increased in our community, the diminished salary and reputation of this board caused these qualified applicants to withdraw. Ignoring all advice to raise the salary and begin the search again, the trustees continued on and hired a candidate with neither the experience nor educational qualifications to run a library the size of Imagine IF. Our area is the fastest growing community in the entire country at present. We need and deserve a library director who can meet the needs of a growing community.

I was present at the meeting when this board voted to hire Ms. Cummins. State Librarian Jennie Stapp was also present at that meeting, joining by Zoom. She cautioned the board that hiring this candidate would decertify ImagineIF and lead to loss of state funding. She was questioned about any recourse that

the board could take. When Ms. Stapp mentioned claiming a hardship as the only recourse, board chair Heidi Roedel asked if they could claim a hardship. There was a long pause, and Ms. Stapp replied that this was not possible, as the board was fully aware of the repercussions before choosing to interview and offer Ms. Cummins the position. I have to say it was one of the most unethical things I have witnessed from a public official in my town. Blaming the State Library for "choosing to withhold the funds", as the Flathead Commissioners claim, is also unethical. The rules are in place to increase the excellence of our libraries. There are many, many patrons of the Imagine If Library System who are in the conflicted position of wanting the state library to uphold these standards, even though we know our library will lose this funding. Our community is embarrassed by the actions of both the commissioners and the three board trustees who want the rules changed because they made a bad decision. I trust that this library commission has the knowledge and expertise to continue to hold to the standards that have been set by the state of Montana. For three unqualified library trustees to come in here, and ask for the rules to be changed, is ludicrous. I thank you for your time today, and for the service you give to libraries across our great state.

Valeri McGarvey
Kalispell
mcgarvey779@gmail.com

Hello,

I am a patron of the Imaginelf library branch in Kalispell. I am deeply concerned with the Library Trustee's action in hiring a director who does not currently meet the standards set by the Montana State Library Commission. It is imperative that we have a qualified, licensed individual who can guide the library and its branches into the future. Disregarding that mandate has obviously had repercussions that are legitimate and should be enforced. The trustees knew well beforehand what the consequences of their decision would be, to now "ask for forgiveness or leniency" is laughable. Standards are present for a reason; please do not cheapen the qualifications for one case, because I fear more will ensue if this is allowed.

I am a high school librarian and libraries have always held an important role in my life. Libraries should be welcoming and accepting places for all the residents of Flathead Valley. The local trustees' actions go against that very precept. I feel they are micromanaging, and their actions are political and not in the best interests of the reading public.

Thank you for your time in this issue. I again ask for a decision that upholds the standards set by the Commission.

Sincerely,

Diane Elliott
185 River Place
Kalispell, MT 59901
elliottdl_2000@yahoo.com

Dear State Library Commission Representatives,

I am writing today to express my serious concern regarding the Imaginlf Library Trustees, Doug Adams, Heidi Roedel and David Ingraham and their attempts to "manage" the Imaginlf Library according to their own narrow beliefs.

These people are political appointees -- not elected officials. I believe they represent a very small, ultra-conservative portion of the Flathead County population that they serve. As such, I believe they are not qualified to serve on the Library Board of Trustees.

They forced the previous director out of her job with their intrusive style of oversight. Several valued and long-term employees have also left. They have now hired a director who clearly does not meet the qualifications required by state library standards. They hired this person under the guise of "fiscal responsibility" but in doing so, they have lost funding and grants. They were warned about this loss of income, but chose to hire an unqualified person anyway. This is not fiscal responsibility. This is manipulation that gives these board members a stronger foothold in running the library.

The new director doesn't even have her undergraduate degree, much less a master's degree. How soon can she complete her education while running a library that is huge, compared to the two person staff she managed in her previous position? It is insane to think she can run the Imaginelf library and complete her degree at the same time. When will she sleep?

Now they want to change the Montana Code Annotated in reference to pornography, or change the library rules so they can ban books they consider pornographic. Doug Adams calls the rule in MCA "a loophole." He calls it a "technicality." I call it protection for libraries in Montana. It allows libraries to carry mainstream literature without being prosecuted by ultra-conservatives who may find a sex scene pornographic or language unacceptable.

The role of a library is to provide its community with information, perspectives, and ideas that may not be in our personal mainstream. Now, more than ever, we need to be able to access a broad range of information and perspectives.

And now a question: How do we get these three off the Imaginelf Board of Trustees? They came to the Board with an agenda that clearly does not protect our fine library or serve our community as a whole.

Best regards,
Lynnette Ludviksen
Kalispell MT
lynnettetmt49@gmail.com

Dear Library Commission,

Due to a surgery, I will be unable to attend the Zoom meeting regarding Flathead County Library. I have forwarded the talking points that you have probably already seen and I'm adding my support. As a retired educator, I acknowledge and appreciate the importance of a quality library and it pains me to see the degradation of ours. Thanks for your consideration,

Katherine Bachrach
816 Karrow Avenue
Whitefish, MT 59937
oreo926@gmail.com

- State Library standards should/must be upheld.
- ImagineIF Trustees actions are part of broader patterns endangering other funding and community trust. The Trustees must be held accountable and responsible.
- State standards call for the director to hold a Master's degree in Library Science. The candidate hired is only a high school graduate.
- The Trustees were told repeatedly before the hiring of the new director that they risked losing State certification and financial support if they proceeded.
- Flathead residents expect and need to have their public library provide top-of-the-class services, not just adequate.
- The ImagineIF library is now short of its previous complement of well-trained, degreed librarians, who have the skills to manage the library

Dear Genevieve,

I have been borrowing books from Imagine If Library in Kalispell since 1985. I love my local library and borrow about 40 books a year. I am appalled by recent decisions made by 3 members of our library board. These 3 trustees knew full and well that they risked precious financial support when they made the decision to hire a candidate with only a high school diploma for a position requiring a masters degree. Our State Library standards must be upheld, these trustees must be held accountable and responsible for their reprehensible decisions. Shame on them.

Sincerely,

Marian Ellison
1484 Memory Lane, Kalispell MT 59901
mellison1@bresnan.net

Dear Genevieve,

As a longtime resident of Flathead county and patron of the ImagineIF Library I have been appalled by the fact that the library has been caught up in the culture wars roiling the United States of late.

I am shocked that the Trustees of the Library have seen fit to appoint an unqualified person to direct the library. It is clear that the library no longer meets state standards and currently falls well below its previous complement of highly trained, degreed librarians. The Trustees were clearly notified in advance of the recent hiring that state standards needed to be upheld if the library was going to continue to receive state funding. They have chosen to defy these norms and to lose the trust of the community.

Please uphold the Montana State Library standards and help our community to hold the trustees accountable for the mess that they have created.

Sincerely yours,
Rosemary
rosemary.mckinnon@gmail.com

Dear Genevieve Lighthiser:

What on earth is happening to our library? Why are such stupid decisions suddenly being made? I went in not long ago, to discover someone had decided to do away with alphabetizing the books and thought it would be a good idea to organize them by genre. I was looking for Le Carré, a spy novel. The librarians weren't sure where I'd find him. It could be Mystery, it could be Thriller, it could be Murder. They were clearly confused by their own ridiculous system. I'd never heard of such a stupid, stupid thing in my life. I didn't have time to try and hunt him down, so thought I would go to the grab-and-go table, that held popular new books. It had been done away with. They'd decided it wasn't needed anymore. Also asinine! I went up to the front stacks where new books were held and couldn't find a thing I wanted to read. The young woman who didn't know how to find Le Carré came to ask me if I'd had any luck. I told her there wasn't a thing I wanted to read on the new bookshelves. She informed me that all the money had been taken away and they had no money for new books. I pointed to the bottom row, which was end-to-end Amish love stories. "There seems to be plenty of money for this genre," I told her. She became very angry with me and I got an unwanted lecture on how many people really like Amish Love stories. I got a pretty clear idea of who it was that was ordering them. Fine, but there should be more intelligent choices available too.

Now, I find out that the reason the funding is gone is because the library trustees have been so stupid, they hired a new director that only holds a high school diploma, when they know state standards call for the director to hold a Master's degree in Library Science. They were told repeatedly before the hiring of the new director that they risked losing State certification and financial support if they proceeded. But they went ahead and did it anyway, making decisions that affect us all as if it's only about them and they clearly don't care. Evidently, as long as they've got a stack of Amish Love stories to read they're all good. This is horrendous. How dare they? How did we get such a band of ignoramuses in place? The last thing we need is dumbing down. It's shameful and embarrassing and they need to be held accountable and then be replaced! Especially the nuts that think they get to decide which books will be banned for my own

good. I'd like to inform you, that I have a very good brain— MFA—and don't require them to censor my choices. No one is forced to read a book that doesn't appeal to them. If it's not for you, put it down and walk away. It's as simple as that. I've held a library card since I was six years old. My mother was on the board of trustees in Whitefish, when I was little. I remember some nut trying to ban The Godfather during her tenure. It was America then and it still is now. Please get this mess cleaned up before it goes any further.

Sincerely,

Michelle Luke
mlukemail@yahoo.com

Dear Ms. Lighthiser,

I am a heavy user of library services through the Imagineif Library System and have made significant donations to the Library Foundation for the proposed new library in Bigfork. I knew the former librarians who headed our award-winning library system and the Executive Director of the Library Foundation who recently quit as well.

I am so sad about what has happened to our wonderful library system. Our Flathead County Commissioners and a number of the Library Board trustees have undermined our libraries and now want the State Library to condone their decisions. I ask you to not approve their appeal so they can justify driving away experienced professional librarians. They treat our library system like it is a liability instead of the wonderful asset it is.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my opinion.

Cathy Cooney
105 Alpine Drive
Bigfork, MT 59911
cmecooney@gmail.com

Dear Ms. Lighthiser,

As a 22 year resident of the Flathead Valley and a life-longer library user, I am shocked and frightened by the actions of the ImagineIF Trustees.

Led by Doug Adams, they are turning our innovative award-winning library into a second class book depository. State library standards are being disregarded and actions must be taken so these standards are upheld. The Trustees hiring a director who holds only a high school diploma instead of the state

standard of a Master's degree in Library Science is one of the most obvious and detrimental actions they have taken.

ImagineIF Trustees actions are part of a broader pattern endangering other funding and the community's trust. They must be held accountable and responsible for their actions.

Thank you!

Mona Charles

--

Mona Charles

mcharles@centurylink.net

406/261-9163 (mobile)

406/756-7641 (home)

Hello Ms. Genevieve Lighthiser,

Please pass on my thoughts to the MT State Library Commissioners for their meeting with our local Flathead Imagine IF Library trustees on Wednesday, April 13th.

I am sorry that I feel I need to write to you, our state library board, with concerns for my community. Libraries for me have been the mainstay of my life since I was a child. My mother introduced me to the library and all that it holds for learning and the magic of books. My mother was a librarian. A children's librarian, actually. My mother loved to read and I love to read. She NEVER tried to censor the books I was reading, nor would she expect an outside source such as a library trustee to make decisions for her or for me, what books were deemed "readable." To this day, I freely use our public Imagine IF library regularly for books, audio books, interlibrary loan materials, the reference librarian, DVD movies, music, library book sales and all that the library has been to our community.

Our public library in the Flathead valley is under assault at this time. We are losing our state accreditation because the local board apparently disrespects the professional library standards established by those far wiser than they are about how to offer PUBLIC library services. Some of our board members seem to lack the concept of public and want to form a private library that matches only their view of what a library has to offer. I have always enjoyed the awe-inspiring amount of knowledge and learning that is housed on the shelves of a public library. Three of our library trustees have decided to hire a director who does not meet the state standards and does not have an education in library science and I am told holds a highschool diploma. This hiring decision will cause decrease in funding and financial resources available to our growing community library system. I am not sure how it will effect the future quality of the services that have been available up until now.

It has been a contentious time in our community as we have discovered how much we love and need our public library. Meetings have been held with heartfelt outpourings from community members voicing their concerns over the future of our public library. Our public library is under the sway of three local library trustees whose votes out number the other two members and thus the three trustees are given power to make decisions that are detrimental to our public library and thus to the citizenry of Flathead County. Please hold our public library as well as all the public libraries in Montana, to the highest

standards to provide exceptional quality public libraries. Please do NOT lower the standards to accommodate the agenda of three people who are current members of our library board of trustees.

You are commissioned to uphold the standards for public libraries for all the citizens of our state, please do so now. Your decision to maintain standards or to lower them to accommodate a private, not a public agenda could effect the future not only the Flathead Imagine IF library, but all the public libraries in our state of Montana.

Thank you so very much,
Sincerely,
Cary Saunders
pcsaunders@montanasky.net

April 12, 2022
To: MT State Library Commission
Re: Flathead County ImagineIf State Certification
From: Jared Sibbitt, resident of Flathead County

The board of trustees has had ample warning and knowledge of the consequences of their actions in choosing to hire a director with a high school diploma rather than a master's degree.

Their history of actions and behaviors has already chased away experienced, dedicated staff that did hold higher education credentials. Nothing in this history suggests an appreciation for the values of an excellent and robust community library, and as such, it is the recommendation of this county resident that the trustees be held to account for their actions, and that the State's standards not be lowered on their account. The pattern of behavior exhibited thus far does not warrant an expectation of improved stewardship from the three trustees in question.

Respectfully,
Jared Sibbitt
Bigfork, MT
jared_sibbitt@hotmail.com

Dear Members of the Montana State Library Commission:

I served on the Montana State Library Commission from 1996-2002 while Karen Strege was the State Librarian. As commissioners we wanted to ensure quality library services for all types of libraries in all areas of Montana. It is still important that Montanans have libraries with high standards of service and it is imperative that the Montana State Library oversees those standards. I commend you for maintaining those standards. Three of the current members of the Flathead County Library Board of Trustees saw fit to hire an unqualified director for the Imagine If Libraries. This action cost the county some of its funding.

Those trustees knew that would happen if they hired the candidate and they did it anyway. Now the county is paying for their mistake which is as it should be!

From 1998 – 2003 I served as the director of the Flathead County Library System. Because I had a Master's Degree in Librarianship from the University of Denver, a fully accredited library school, I was fully qualified to serve in that position. It was complex and required many skills that were not strictly related to my library training. That is appropriate for someone who is leading a large library system.

Thank you for letting me share my feelings with you.

Sincerely,

Dorothy Pemberton Laird

1750 Cliffview Lane

Whitefish, Montana 59937

(406) 862-6356

dlaird@silverbow.net
