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To: Waukesha County Library Boards
From: Brittany Larson, Bridges Library System Director
Date: February 4, 2026
Re: Proposed Library Standards for Waukesha County Library Board Endorsement Consideration

Waukesha County Board Chair James Heinrich appointed a Library Planning Committee in the summer of 2025 based on the need to update the County Library Services Plan as set forth in Wis. Stat. 43.11. The 13-member Committee worked on the Plan from August 2025 through February 2026. A new five-year County Library Services Plan was endorsed by the Committee on February 3, 2026, after a public hearing was held. Within the plan includes a proposed revision of county library standards. These proposed standards go into effect if adopted by the Waukesha County Board of Supervisors and the Waukesha County libraries, following the parameters outlined in Wis. Stat. 43.11(3)(d):

The plan of library services for a county may include minimum standards of operation for public libraries in the county. The county shall hold a public hearing on any standards proposed under this paragraph. The standards shall take effect if they are approved by the county and the public library boards of at least 50 percent of the participating municipalities in the county that contain, according to the most recent estimate prepared under s. 16.96, at least 80 percent of the population of participating municipalities in the county.

The Plan proposes a reduction to four of the numerical *Minimum to Exempt Standards* measures and maintaining the levels of two others. Each of these was reviewed carefully by the Committee. Table 1 below shows a summary of the recommended *Minimum to Exempt Standards*.

Table 1: Minimum to Exempt Standards Measures and Status

Measure	Status
Materials Expenditures per Capita	Reduced, see pages 22-23 of plan draft
Hours Open	Maintained, see pages 24-25 of plan draft
Full-time Equivalent Staff (FTE)	Reduced, see pages 26-27 of plan draft
Collection Size	Reduced, see pages 28-29 of plan draft
Internet Connected Public Computers/Devices	Reduced, see pages 29-30 of plan draft
Wireless Internet Access	Maintained, see page 31 of plan draft
OPTIONAL: Library Service Effort Ratio (LSER) (Replaces all <i>Minimum to Exempt Standards</i> listed above.)	Maintained, see pages 19-21 of plan draft

It is important to note that these proposed numeric benchmarks remain *Minimum to Exempt Standards*. They are not proposed as aspirational goals, but baseline expectations.

The proposed plan also calls for a continuation of the six *Quality Assurance Standards* to help ensure the County libraries are well managed and accountable (see page 31 of the plan draft).

Below are the *Quality Assurance Standards* the library board would be asked to certify annually:

- Library board members receive an orientation upon appointment to a library board.
- The library's website includes contact information of key staff and board members as well as board agendas and minutes.
- The library board conducts an annual review of its library director.
- The library budget includes funding to ensure professional development for the library director and staff.
- The library has an active strategic plan.
- The library adopts the core policies included in the *Wisconsin Public Library Tier One Standards*: 1) Circulation, 2) Collection Management, 3) Computer/Internet Use, 4) Meeting Room Use (as necessary), 5) Public Behavior (Rules of Conduct), and 6) Personnel.

In order for a library's municipality(ies) to qualify for exemption from the county library tax levy, the library must meet all of the *Quality Assurance Standards* above, as well as the first six numerical *Minimums to Exempt Standards* or the optional LSER in Table 1. The LSER is a mathematical calculation of the residents' use of libraries other than their own. If a library meets its target ratio, its municipal residents are not imposing an undue burden on neighboring libraries.

While the goal of the Plan is to assure that all libraries are operating at or above the *Minimums to Exempt* and are meeting all *Quality Assurance Standards*, the Plan recognizes that some libraries may suffer an occasional one-year setback. Therefore, the Plan allows a library a one-time exception during this county library plan cycle from meeting each of the *Minimums to Exempt* standards and *Quality Assurance Standards*. The Plan also allows for additional exceptions for unanticipated events such as a worldwide pandemic. However, if the LSER is chosen by a library in lieu of meeting the first six numerical *Minimums to Exempt*, an exception may not be applied to meeting the LSER target ratio.

Finally, all standards requirements are in addition to the library's municipal requirement to meet or exceed the county library tax rate as required in Wis. Stats. 43.64 (2) or, in the case of a joint library, to fund its library at not less than the average of the previous three years as allowed in 43.64 (2) (c).

To assist you in understanding what your library's 2027 requirements would be, your library's *Minimums to Exempt* (based on 2025 Wisconsin Department of Administration population data) are shown in Appendix D of the plan draft (pages 48-53). A sample of how the LSER calculation works (using the most recent data available: 2025 circulation data for 2026 levy exemption) is also shown on pages 19-20 of the plan draft. Appendix C of the plan (pages 44-48) shows the *Minimums to Exempt* criteria along with the requirements across the entire graduated population range should

you wish to project your community's growth over the next five years.

Because we hope to have the new plan in effect for the 2027 budget planning process, I request your library board consider these standards for possible endorsement at your February meeting. I would like to take this opportunity to thank your library director for their engagement in this important process, as well as those library directors, trustees, municipal officials, and citizens that sat on the committee or participated in thoughtful discussions throughout this planning term. Thank you for your consideration. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Waukesha County Library Standards Endorsement

Please fill out and return to the System office by February 25, 2026.

Endorsement: (Please check one)	☐ The library board DOES endorse the proposed standards ☐ The library board DOES NOT endorse the proposed standards
Comments	
Library	
Date	
Name of Board President	
Signature of Board President	
Name of Library Director	
Signature of Library Director	