

The Human Relations Commission strongly encourages the City Council of Independence to pass resolution 22-812. In 2016, 62.3% of voters in Jackson, Platte, and Clay Counties approved a levy increase so that Mid-Continent Public Library could improve buildings, respond to rising costs, and expand its services. We as a Commission are concerned that a contingency of the Mid-Continent Public Library Board of Trustees is attempting to overrule the will of the voters and decrease the levy. This would effectively deprive over 30 libraries, including 4 in Independence, of the funds required to continue to provide services. The actions of this contingency of the Library Board, the same contingency that voted against the Library's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion audit, appear to not be in good faith or in the interests of the 840,292 individuals who reside in Mid-Continent Public Library's district.

The four Mid-Continent Public Library branches in Independence provide vital services to our community. All of the libraries provide free access to computers, Wi-Fi, and other technology. A sizeable portion of our community uses these resources to apply for jobs and gain access to educational and employment training opportunities. Young people without computers or internet access in their homes use these resources to get assistance with and complete schoolwork. The libraries also provide services that bolster early literacy skills in the community. During the library's most recent fiscal year, MCPL provided 128 programs to promote early literacy in Independence, which were attended by thousands of children and their caregivers. The Library also provides free books via their Reading Rocket to children in transportation deserts in Independence to promote early literacy in the community. These programs serve as a supplement to the literacy efforts of the Independence School District.

In addition to technology and early literacy services, the Library is also one of the few places members of the public can go for free. Mid-Continent Public Library branches serve as heating and cooling centers in extreme weather. Residents who struggle with food security can go to the Farview Neighborhood Library for assistance as the branch is also a food pantry. If the Library is forced to cut services, where will these residents go to receive these services?

The City of Independence has an interest in a strong library district with materials and services for everyone. Without proper funding, the Library will be forced to cut services that our city currently has no capacity to absorb elsewhere. It would be detrimental to the interests of the people the Council represents, especially children as well as the elderly, disabled, and low-income and unhoused residents of the City of Independence. Therefore, we strongly urge the council to pass resolution 22-812 to discourage the Mid-Continent Public Library Board of Trustees from lowering the voter-approved levy.

Independence Human Relations Commission