

May 12, 2022

Dear Governor Walz,

I am writing today on behalf of cities and libraries across Minnesota regarding the Capital Projects Fund. My understanding is that Minnesota will be receiving a total of \$180M, with \$70M earmarked for broadband infrastructure. Regarding the undesignated \$110M, please consider designating a portion of this funding to Minnesota cities for updates to library infrastructure (including both renovation and construction projects) in response to public libraries' vital role in providing digital access to Minnesotans across the state.

Public libraries, and the cities responsible for their infrastructure, are worthy recipients of this funding. Public libraries in both rural and metro Minnesota are responsible for providing digital access to Minnesotans who cannot afford devices, computers, or connectivity for accessing broadband at home. Our local public library provides digital access, so that local residents can connect with experts to receive health check-ups, legal advice, partake in job interviews, and connect with other vital agencies and services. There are many reasons to support this effort, including the following:

- Border-to-border broadband serving all Minnesota households is important. But, until all Minnesotans have affordable, stable housing AND the finances to pay for an annual internet service subscription plus devices AND the skills to use this technology, border-to-border access does not mean access for all. Safe, welcoming public library facilities remain essential.
- Since 1994, the state legislature has appropriated only \$17.9M for library construction projects. This federal funding could make a huge difference for libraries in all corners of Minnesota.
- Over 40 libraries have been identified with an urgent need for repairs totalling over \$90M.
- The average age of a Minnesota Public Library building is 52 years.
- From 1994-2020, the Public Library Construction Grant program has secured approximately \$6.24 in local investment for every \$1 in state investment.

Please support this effort to improve our libraries, so that we can continue to provide wide-spread digital access to the residents of Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Thom Walker
Mayor