

Statement

Impact of the Universal Service Fund Rural Libraries

Congressional Rural Caucus

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February 2, 2005

I would like to thank Congressman Stupak and the members of the Congressional Rural Caucus for this opportunity to talk about the value of the E-Rate program in Michigan. 314,000 people live in Michigan's isolated rural Upper Peninsula, an area larger than New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Delaware combined. It is as far from the western Upper Peninsula to our state's capitol as it is from Lansing to our nation's capitol. Touched by three Great Lakes, northern Michigan is a place of great beauty, but relatively high unemployment and low income per capita.

Knowledge is power in the Information Age, and the Internet is the most important power tool people in rural areas have today to overcome geographic constraints and remain competitive in a global economy.

Upper Peninsula libraries formed a consortium seven years ago and aggregated bandwidth in order to drive down the cost of Internet access. Our consortium has received Universal Service Fund discounts for seven years, and we have used our E-rate savings responsibly to leverage other funding opportunities so that public libraries can afford **the broadband access** that rural people need and deserve.

In 2003 and 2004, our library consortium used a combination of Universal Service Fund, E-rate discounts, Reed Act and Library Services and Technology federal funding, and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation grants to pay for broadband upgrades. Only 17.5% of Upper Peninsula homes have broadband. Broadband availability in public libraries resulted in huge increases in numbers of people using library computers. In the past four years, Internet computer use has gone up 100% in the Menominee public library and 200% in the Marquette public library.

The E-rate program gives rural libraries the opportunity to improve access to the Internet, and with access has come the further opportunity to interconnect with other regional, state and national resources.

What does this mean to a **small business entrepreneur** in Marquette, Michigan? It means access to resources in the local public library, Internet access to 1.5 million holdings in 64 Upper Peninsula libraries, and online access to \$3.5 million annual subscriptions to commercial databases, provided by the Library of Michigan, with a broad range of resources - including newspapers, full text magazine articles, research reports and much more – that give him or her the tools to succeed.

The E-rate program levels the playing field for people across the U.S. It gives people in rural areas access to the same information tools that people in urban areas take for granted.

Joe Constance, Marquette businessperson, goes online many times a month to use research tools, like the Michigan eLibrary's General Business File ASAP database. He says online tools save him thousands of dollars and improve his business productivity.

The E-rate program in isolated rural libraries means access, opportunities, and resources for business people that were once available only in large urban libraries.

Roland Whitted, who does not have a home computer, used the Marquette library's Internet access to get a job with the National Park Service. Only online job applications were accepted. **22,000 people** have used www.Mijob.info, a web site created a year ago by northern Michigan librarians to help people locate jobs, research employers, and learn resume writing and interview skills.

The Michigan eLibrary **Learn-A-Test** database helps every citizen in Michigan qualify for jobs with practice exams for GED, SAT, civil service, military, and other careers.

Internet connectivity provides access to resources for business, educational, and personal use that were unavailable before.

Karen Valley, a **Negaunee home schooling mother** on a limited income, states that library Internet access has been a 'godsend' for her to advertise her home-based business and for her 12-year-old daughter, giving her access to myriad educational resources, like "**eLibrary for Kids**" and "**InfoBits for Kids**," two other databases provided by the Library of Michigan through the Michigan eLibrary web site: www.mel.org.

Upper Peninsula libraries use broadband for 2-way interactive video conferencing for distance learning, saving money for time and travel. **Multipoint connectivity of remote sites** for 'real time' collaboration allows rural people to

participate online when decisions are made in Lansing and in DC. Connectivity is critical to business people and economic development in rural areas.

Library staff at eight remote locations connected to a Michigan training seminar in 2002 on compliance with the Michigan Privacy Act and the USA Patriot Act and heard presentations by legal specialists, the FBI, and the American Library Association.

Yesterday people came to the library to access their email, a relatively low bandwidth usage. Today people want to plug their laptops into the library's network for Internet access. Tomorrow they will expect wireless access from anywhere in the library, streaming audio and video for distance learning, access to multi-gigabyte digital graphic and text files, and real time 2-way interactive connectivity to a research librarian from their homes.

Our **national vision is a totally connected library community** that gives people access to information when they want it, where they want it, and in the format they need. This vision is possible because of the Internet and other advanced telecommunications services, and it is affordable in libraries because of the E-Rate program. **Without the E-rate program, rural libraries could not afford to give their communities broadband Internet access and other advanced telecommunications services.**

Appendix
Written Statement on the Value of the Universal Service Fund,
E-rate Program, in Rural Libraries
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"Without the assistance of e-rate, this library would have to make drastic cuts in the budget for materials or staff to pay for Internet service. Help libraries help our citizens remain informed, well-educated participants in their world. Continue to support e-rate so libraries can provide a level playing field for all Americans."
Barbara Bartel, West Iron District Library Director

The West Iron District Library, in Iron River, has experienced a 100% increase in public use of Internet computers in the past four years. Library staff used their broadband connection over 9,000 times in 2004 to obtain facts and information for their library users.

The following comments were solicited in a 24-hour period, January 24-25, 2005, from Marquette, Michigan residents who were using the Peter White Public Library Internet computer lab.

"I coordinate a children's literacy program online using the Internet at Peter White Public Library. If the library stopped Internet service that would short circuit the program." Christine Simonette

"It is important to access all sorts of information in a timely manner much of which is available in no other way. Also many library resources are now available only online." Carol McNulty

"I do not have a telephone or at home access to the Internet. By being able to use the internet at the Peter White Public Library, I am able to download and print information and forms from my part time employer, pay bills online and keep in touch with nationwide special interest groups to which I belong." Harvey Musket

"I had the good fortune in the last couple of months to be allowed to distribute \$10,000 in art equipment, from a local university to local nonprofits. In order to distribute these items a great deal of documentation and research was needed. My only access to computers is through the Peter White Public Library." Susie Colquitt

"I started going online in 2000 using Peter White Public Library computers and free access to the inter-net. Since then every aspect of my life has been enriched tenfold. Career wise, staying in touch with relatives I haven't seen in 20 years, medical information, keeping current with NASA activities, experiencing photography in a new way...." Professional Photographer, Jerry Bielicki