



**MINNESOTA LIBRARY**  
ASSOCIATION

Remarks given by MLA Intellectual Freedom Committee Chair, Megan Kocher, at a press conference held by Minnesota Senator, Al Franken.

September 1, 2017

Thank you, Senator Franken. We are grateful for the work you have done and continue to do to advocate for net neutrality.

As chair of the Intellectual Freedom Committee for the Minnesota Library Association, I represent librarians and libraries across the state -- from small rural public libraries to community college libraries to large academic research libraries like we have at the University of Minnesota.

The Minnesota Library Association calls on the FCC to keep net neutrality protections firmly and meaningfully in place. Like the American Library Association and the Association of Research Libraries, we take a strong stance on this because it is core to what is important in our work.

Librarians are advocates for intellectual freedom and information access, which is integral to our work in helping people access and distribute information and research. This is key to an educated public and engaged citizenry. In an age when the tools needed for success in business, school, and public engagement are largely available online and nowhere else, the speed with which you access information is not a convenience— it is just access.

Speed equals access.

I am going to speak to how a commitment to open internet and net neutrality is critical to two kinds of libraries: public libraries and research libraries.

Public libraries are community and information hubs and because they exist in large and small communities across the country, they are part of the infrastructure we have to connect people to information, especially in parts of the country where broadband access is hard to come by for individuals. I grew up in a small town of 1200 people and there is still no way to get fiber or cable internet at my parents' house.

This is where the abstract of intellectual freedom and freedom of access can become a little more real. People go to libraries to work on resumes, apply for jobs, watch streaming lectures for their online courses, look up health information, and work remotely from somewhere with stable internet.

Access to information has tangible results. It opens economic opportunity to people, it provides them the ability to become more informed as citizens, and it is key to our ability to access education. We cannot risk this level of freedom: access must be equal. As the ALA says in its statement on net neutrality, the alternative is that broadband providers would be free to leverage their quasi-monopolies to their own advantage.

There are no deep pockets in public libraries to pay for fast lanes to information.

Research libraries like those at community colleges, universities, and medical research facilities are equally committed to ensuring intellectual freedom and information access. Our users are not just students in dorm rooms on campus or faculty in their offices. When I was in college, I spent hours making photocopies of physical articles to use for my coursework. Now, most of our library resources are online. The ability to access research and other quality information is critical to our faculty and researchers, but also to our students, many of whom do their work off-campus. With net neutrality, we know that students taking online courses or studying in the evenings after getting home from jobs can access our library resources at the same speeds they can access Netflix or Hulu.

The ALA stresses that as well. They note that “libraries’ longstanding commitment to freedom of expression in the realm of content is well-known; in the context of the net neutrality debate, however, we believe it is equally important to stress that the freedom of libraries and librarians to provide innovative new kinds of information services will be central to the growth and development of our democratic culture. A world in which librarians and other noncommercial enterprises are of necessity limited to the Internet’s “slow lanes” while high-definition movies can obtain preferential treatment seems to us to be overlooking a central priority for a democratic society – the necessity of enabling educators, librarians, and, in fact, all citizens to inform themselves and each other just as much as the major commercial and media interests can inform them.”

I want to again thank Senator Franken for inviting me to represent the Minnesota Libraries Association perspective on net neutrality and for your hard work on this issue. I’d like to stress that I hope we can continue the commitment we made to having a truly open internet that encourages engagement, information access, and innovation.