

## **Michigan Library Association Statement on Internet Access, Child Safety and Internet Filters in Public Libraries**

The Michigan Library Association (MLA) believes that the Internet is a critically important medium for access to information resources. Because the Internet is a vast and unregulated information network, users risk encountering material that may be inaccurate, personally offensive, or controversial. The children we serve may be especially vulnerable when using it. We are committed to assuring that our libraries are as safe as possible for the many children who visit them each day.

We believe that our children's' safety, when accessing electronic resources, can best be protected by having caring and involved parents provide guidance, with the assistance of caring and knowledgeable library staff. We are confident in the ability of local library Boards to develop library policies that protect children, while also protecting the First Amendment rights of those who wish to access constitutionally protected information.

We believe the use of Internet filters in public libraries is a local governing Board decision, to be reached only after careful consideration of the pros and cons of such technology. We caution any library Board considering the use of Internet filters to do so only in the context of a broader Internet Use policy that addresses the fundamental First Amendment protections that have long been a cornerstone of public library service. We further caution any library Board considering the use of Internet filters that sole reliance on such software tools is an imperfect way to protect children. Library patrons should be advised that any filters in use by the library are unlikely to filter out 100% of illegal or objectionable material and may block constitutionally protected material.

We support Public Act 212 of 2000, sponsored by then State Senator Mike Rogers, now Congressman Mike Rogers (R-Brighton) that requires local libraries to have Internet Use Policies that protect both the safety of children and the First Amendment rights of all who use our libraries. PA 212 provides that local governing Boards make decisions regarding the use of Internet filters, and that access to constitutionally protected information via the Internet must be assured. These provisions are key elements of the legislation that acknowledge the need for a balanced approach to this issue.

The Michigan Library Association opposes federally mandated Internet filtering in our state's libraries. We believe that reliance on filters, while effective in some situations, is not a solution to the problem in and of itself. Any mandates to filter all workstations will, without question, block some library patrons from accessing constitutionally protected information. We consider this unacceptable, and quite inferior to the approach taken by the Michigan Legislature in PA 212.

Michigan Library Association  
Public Policy Committee  
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