

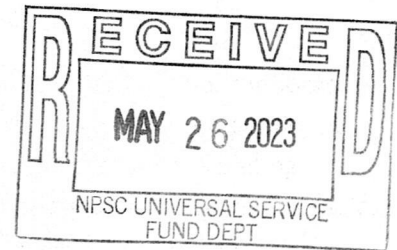


Southeast Library System
5730 R St. Suite C-1
Lincoln, NE 68505
(402) 467-6188

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May 26, 2023

Nebraska Public Service Commission
1200 N Street, Suite 300
Lincoln, NE 68508



Dear Commissioners,

I am writing in response to your request for comments on the program to incentivize fiber construction connected to the E-Rate program.

My organization is a non-profit that provides training and consulting in best practices to libraries in the southeast corner of our state. We support 75 public libraries in our area, so while I do not have firsthand perspective, I am in a position to recognize some overall trends.

One of the reasons for the lack-luster participation is that there has a substantial turnover for library directors over the past three years, at least in the counties our organization supports. The pandemic hastened retirements and other staffing changes. Many of the new directors are new to running libraries and most are new to librarianship in general, thus their priorities have been to learn the basics of running a library, as well as learning the priorities of the community and local government.

Another reason mentioned by a handful of library boards is there is concern about on-going expenses for the service, post installation. Many smaller libraries have limited funding and even with an E-Rate discount for services each year, their budgets cannot absorb the increased cost, especially where some of the municipalities are consistently looking for budget cuts, due to a shrinking tax base.

Extending the program could show returns as those new librarians get settled and can look for growth of services instead of learning on the job. This would also allow for a better examination of where funding could be reallocated to pay for ongoing service.

Thank you all for asking for comments on this topic. I hope these are helpful in making your decision.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Scott Childers".

Scott Childers,
Executive Director, Southeast Library System