



August 20, 2025

Flathead Library Board of Trustees
Attn: Chairperson Dave Ingram
247 1st Avenue E
Kalispell, MT 59901

Dear Flathead County Library Trustees:

As President of the Flathead Library Foundation, and as a dedicated library patron, I am writing to express strong support for the continuation of the 'Hotspot' lending program, which has been available at our three library branches since 2020.

Unfortunately, the federal Digital Competitive Grant from the National Telecommunication and Information Administration which funded this program, has been discontinued. Over the past five years, the Hotspots lending program has demonstrated a consistent track record of high usage and popularity among our patrons.

Libraries are uniquely positioned to provide tools and resources that improve the lives of their communities. For individuals without smartphones, costly data plans, or reliable internet access, a Hotspot lending program helps bridge the digital divide. It enables access to essential services such as education, employment opportunities, healthcare, and more.

Hotspot lending programs, often located in central areas, become vital access points for those facing connectivity barriers. For example:

- Students can complete homework and research assignments.
- Job seekers can search listings and submit applications.
- Individuals can manage medical appointments, vehicle registration, banking, and other online tasks.
- And yes, patrons can also enjoy movies, music, podcasts, and social media—important aspects of digital inclusion.

With federal funding no longer available, private local funding sources are stepping up and have provided donations for this purpose.. The Foundation is prepared to accept these funds into a restricted account dedicated to this purpose and distribute them to the library as needed/requested.



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A quick search reveals that nearly half of all public libraries in the U.S. now offer Hotspots for checkout. Let's not be the half that leaves our patrons "out of service."

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Erica Wirtala". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Erica Wirtala, Board President
Flathead Library Foundation