

RAILS BOARD STATEMENT ON UNIVERSAL LIBRARY SERVICE OCTOBER, 2021

The RAILS website states:

As long as even one Illinois resident does not have access to a public library, our state is not meeting its basic obligations to educate all residents.

Access to public libraries is a crucial part of early childhood literacy, lifelong learning and academic success. Illinois residents are at a disadvantage with other states that have universal service when they compete for college admission or jobs throughout their lives.

Since systems were established in 1967, Illinois librarians and stakeholders have been discussing how to establish universal library service in our state. In the Illinois Library System Act which established the systems and still governs them, responsibility is specifically given to systems to find ways to serve the unserved.

RAILS takes this responsibility very seriously; it is part of our strategic plan and our board has established a Universal Service Committee to raise awareness and discuss new possible avenues of service.

RAILS, with the advice and guidance of the board and the Universal Service Committee, has been working for four years to achieve universal library service in Illinois and we have had some success through small projects or local initiatives. But incremental progress is not enough. At this time, RAILS believes that it is essential that the library community in Illinois come together, under the leadership of the Illinois State Library, to develop a plan and timeline for achieving universal service. We ask that the State Library convene a group to discuss and develop the plan and timeline.

Fifty-four years have passed since 1967. Many plans have been developed and left to gather dust. We can wait no longer to achieve this important and fundamental goal to bring equitable library service to Illinois residents.