

Testimony of David Belanger

To: Senate Education Committee

Re: SB 1225 – The Library Code

Wednesday, September 21, 2011

Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Education Committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on Senate Bill 1225 the proposed revision to the Library Code and congratulate you on your decision to undertake this important task. I would also like to thank Senator Pileggi for his leadership in this revision.

My name is David Belanger and I have been an employee of the Delaware County Library System in Media for 25 years. For the past 18 years I've been the director. The Delaware County Library System is a department of county government that provides support services to 26 independent public libraries. We provide such centralized services as technology, delivery and promotion of libraries. In addition to my formal job responsibilities I have served on many committees for the Pennsylvania Library Association and for the past four years I've been a member of the Governor's Advisory Council on Library Development.

The work contained in this legislation and the report from the Joint State Government Commission is impressive. Just consolidating the statutes and the regulations will make it much easier for libraries and their supporters to understand the framework in which libraries function. This is an important first step and I hope that as this legislation progresses we are able to take many more steps toward providing the citizens of the Commonwealth with the quality libraries they expect.

I would like to focus my comments on two areas; flexibility and efficiency. The new code needs to be flexible enough to adapt to rapid changes in library services, and have the capability to provide services through larger regions to realize greater efficiency.

When the original library code was developed in 1961, technology was covered in the code with the standard that the library needed to have a telephone listed in the phonebook; and the most exotic thing lent by a library was a phonograph LP. As you are well aware, that is not the case today and what is typical now could be obsolete in five years. Libraries now lend everything from books to ebook readers. They also provide virtual library services, such as access to downloadable ebooks and sending notices by text messaging. It's hard to image what will be next and the rate of change is increasing. The new code should provide for expanded flexibility by strengthening the powers of the State Librarian and the Advisory Council to more easily update standards of library service and enforcement of standards. The legislation does

reconfigure the Council to include more professional librarians which will increase its ability to deal with more technical matters. Having the ability to easily promulgate rules and regulations in response to state-wide needs will result in more relevant standards for current library service.

The new technologies that are now available and other changes in how libraries operate allow for options for increased efficiency. The proposed legislation could benefit from providing more avenues for libraries to cooperate and consolidate services, particularly on a regional level. The State Library has encouraged regional cooperation and a formal regional structure was part of the second tier of the Joint State Government Commission's report. In the southeast region we have already been able to negotiate excellent pricing cooperatively and we have been able to hold more extensive training for our staff due to our regional cooperation. Formalizing this regional structure would help increase this efficient use of tax dollars. Other options for consolidating physical libraries should also be considered.

The current library code has helped formalize library service in Pennsylvania. It has taken us from loosely structured organizations to libraries that provide quality modern services. At this point it is making it difficult to move forward. This legislation is an important part of that progress, and I hope you will consider my comments and those of my colleagues today as you fine tune SB 1225.

I thank you for your time and attention.