

**Testimony of
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**Senate Education Committee Hearing on Senate Bill 1225
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Good afternoon. My name is Kate Geiger and I am the Director of the Indiana Free Library located in the borough of Indiana. I am honored to speak before the committee and I appreciate the sensitivity you have shown working with the Library Code to understand the issues faced by Pennsylvania librarians. Thank you for undertaking this task.

The Library Code is 50 years old. Over these past 50 years, libraries have made significant changes, and will continue to do so. Our library laws will need to change with us.

For the past six years, I have served as Director of a library at the county seat of Indiana County with a service area of 32,000 residents, basically the four municipalities within the Indiana School District at the heart of the county. Beyond my library, there are just two additional small libraries at the southern tip of my county that serve around 3,000 residents each. The remainder of our county's 47,407 residents is in the category of "unserved" or those who pay an annual fee for access to a library. The county next to us faces the same situation and, together, we represent the largest unserved population in the state. Today, I would like to speak for those who live in Pennsylvania and do not have access to a public library.

Last spring, I attended a conference in Georgia and spoke with many who are working with a statewide catalog project like one that we hope to create here in Pennsylvania. What most impressed me was not their knowledge of the software, but that they were able to stand and say that every resident who worked, lived or owned property in Georgia was eligible for a Library Card. That is my goal for Pennsylvania too!

But in counties like ours, this is a huge challenge. Indiana is the sixth poorest county in Pennsylvania with a median household income under \$30,000 per year. Given this reality, I believe that access to a public library, no matter how small or underfunded, is critical for our citizens who have nowhere else to turn. We do not have a quality bookstore and access to technology such as a Kindle isn't an option for many needy families and displaced workers. Our residents need access to high-quality, reliable resources found in a library, and that is our mission.

Unfortunately, as things stand now with the Library Code, funding efforts would remain on the annual roller coaster of seeking funds from municipal governments. Without strong county

direction and coordination, local libraries are left to seek support from our 38 municipalities, some that may or may not want—or have the ability—to support library services.

For starters, my hope for SB 1225 is that a new Library Code would clarify definitions and lines of responsibility so that there is no confusion between municipality and county; no confusion between district service areas and direct service; no confusion over funding responsibility.

I believe that a system of library services based at the county level would simplify the whole system, focusing on service, reducing time and money spent with multiple-levels of government, meeting time, statistic gathering, audits, and many back-office procedures. Streamlining all of these efforts through a system of only 67 counties, as opposed to 2568 municipalities, just makes good sense, reducing the time and money expended and creating a solid and more visible structure which would focus all of our efforts. Our neighbors to the south in Maryland use a county-based system and the wisdom of this system insures that all residents would have access to library resources. Ohio to our west also offers service to all residents. There is no need to reinvent the wheel with good models nearby that could be examined and adopted in Pennsylvania.

In addition to county-based funding, I would like to ask you to focus your attention on a second issue, flexibility or “scalability” to encourage the growth and development of libraries. All of the residents in my county need access to library services yet, without a county system or county library in Indiana County, thousands of residents remain unserved. My hope is that SB 1225 will include language that allows some scalability as our county moves from unserved to served. We know there is growing need for library service and the surveys we have done show that there is growing support for expanding library services. But it becomes nearly impossible if the funding formula in the current Library Code remains frozen. This means that there is no way for a new library to enter the state aid program, a clear disincentive for growing library services at a time when more service is needed.

Likewise, fixed-dollar per capita standards make it more difficult for poor counties like ours to participate in the state aid program. I would encourage the committee to look at ways to add greater flexibility to the existing fixed dollar per capita standard, perhaps moving to a standard that starts lower and grows as the local support grows. The Library Code should be the instrument for development and should insure efficient, high-quality operations even in tough times.

I congratulate this committee for responding to the need to support libraries through a modernized Library Code. I appreciate your consideration for the two issues that I have raised here—stronger emphasis on county-based services and greater flexibility in standards that will encourage future growth. Thank you for this opportunity today and for listening.