

TO: Members, Senate Education Committee

FROM: Douglas E. Hill, Executive Director

SUBJECT: Senate Education Committee Hearing on SB 1225

DATE: September 15, 2011

The County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) is a non-profit, non-partisan association providing legislative and regulatory representation, education, research, insurance, technology, and other services on behalf of all of the Commonwealth's 67 counties. I am pleased to provide the Senate Education Committee with our written comments regarding Senate Bill 1225 and counties' perspective on the local library system.

Counties recognize the benefit of a strong local library system as a resource for information and enrichment and as part of the amenities that promote community. In addition to the books, magazines and other reference materials that have long been the staple of local libraries, these facilities are continually updating their services to ensure public Internet access, provide continuing education training, homework help services and workshops, and offer other support services needed in the community. Circulation has skyrocketed, both at bricks-and-mortar branches and through the use of new online resources. Knowledgeable staff and countless volunteers keep the system running smoothly.

Under the current Library Code, where there is a county library system, county officials appoint several members of the board that govern the system. Also, most if not all counties provide some level of financial support to their local library system, and there are incentives in the current funding system to encourage this local funding. In short, counties have a vested interest in seeing the local library system flourish for a wide variety of reasons.

The Association's policy positions, developed and voted on by our membership annually, support improvements in the Commonwealth's system of local libraries. These proposed improvements include:

- Increasing state aid to local libraries
- Maintaining local library operating systems
- Providing incentives for municipalities to maintain or increase their funding share
- Recognizing the varying needs among libraries and library systems
- Allowing libraries to bank funds for planned projects without adversely affecting the state funding share
- Allowing local libraries to accept an increased state funding share without a requirement for additional local match

In addition, this year the Association amended its legislative policy platform to support the elimination of what is currently Section 303.6(1) of the Library Code, which requires library systems to expend 12 percent of their operating budgets on materials. In the face of declining state support over the past decade, this particular section forces county library systems to make needless choices and forces expenditures that might be contrary to true local need, and we would suggest that this provision be replaced with a state incentive program.

Our Association has a close working relationship with the Pennsylvania Library Association as well, and look to their direction for more specific recommendations. As this Committee continues its work on Senate Bill 1225, we would be pleased to be part of that process in collaborating on further reforms, and look forward to working with you.