



Good Afternoon,

My name is Bill Hudson. I am currently the acting administrator for the Library System of Lancaster County. I want to thank the members of the committee for the invitation here today. I also want to thank you for initiating the process to update the library code for Pennsylvania. Senate Bill 1225 represents an excellent beginning to the task of bringing the code into line with the needs of today.

My colleagues and I are sharing with you today a significant number of code related changes that we think will help the public libraries in Pennsylvania become more successful in serving their communities. Members of my library system have their own list of concerns, examples of which are put forth in the attached letter. But my topic today is term limits and continuing education for library trustees. These issues are not addressed in SB 1225 but I hope that at some point they will make it into a revision of the Library Code.

Trustee term limits may sound like a minor issue, out of place with the larger issues of funding, standards and regionalization. But the topic of term limits leads to the ultimate determining factor in the success or failure of any organization. Whether it's a Fortune 500 company, a government or a public library, the key factor of success is the quality of leadership at the top of the organization. In public libraries, the point from which all leadership flows is the board of trustees. The ultimate responsibility for success in a public library begins and ends with this small group of community volunteers.

New trustees come to the board with a desire to do good. They give up personal time for board meetings, committee meetings, municipal appearances, fund raisers and the list goes on. Each board member comes to the group with his/her own unique set of ideas, perspectives, skills and life experiences. In general, this system works okay and library boards are able to go about the business of providing the governance required for a public library.

The system breaks down though when board members become "lifers." Far too many public libraries have boards with members whose tenure on the board stretches into decades. On one hand, we want to applaud and express deep gratitude for the devotion these individuals have shown to the library and their communities. But on the other hand, like the overprotective parent, this devotion can and does stifle the growth and success of the library.

Effective boards need a constant influx of new ideas, experiences and perspectives to prevent stagnation of both thought and action. Without term limits, boards can become complacent in the recruitment of new members. It is far too easy for members to stay on for ten, fifteen or more years. Most if not all library directors recognize the need for board turnover. But our in smaller libraries, operating on a shoestring budget with less than a skeleton crew, it is frequently on the "when I get time" list. In the most distressing instances, some board members refuse to leave the board, even when it is clear to others that they are no longer effective. In many communities, the confrontation

necessary to remove an ineffective board member would be unthinkable, so the board may continue to function but at less than optimal capacity.

At the suggestion of term limits, many of my colleagues in smaller libraries will cringe and state, truly, that is so difficult to find board members that once they have them, they are loathe to let them go. Term limits could be a real burden for libraries in sparsely populated areas. But as the members of my own library system are quick to remind me, one size does not fit all. Term limits if applied, could be population dependent with longer terms for board members in low population areas and shorter ones for those in more metropolitan areas.

However they are applied, term limits are a necessary component in the revamping of the Library Code. In addition to term limits, I am also advocating for the inclusion in the code, a requirement of continuing education for trustees. The code currently includes continuing education for library directors and in some instances, library staff. Effective governance is a complex endeavor which requires a myriad of skills and areas of knowledge.

While some board trustees may come to the board with the requisite skills and knowledge to be an effective member of the board, the more likely scenario is that they do not. Continuing education requirements will help to ensure that all board members are given the opportunity to improve their ability to provide effective governance. These two suggestions, term limits and continuing education, are in response to economic and technological changes which compel us to strive for new levels of effectiveness.

In closing, let me say thank you once again for both the invitation today and the efforts you are undertaking. Senate Bill 1225 represents a significant step on the behalf of the legislature to modernize the library code. I hope through our collective efforts we ensure that Pennsylvania citizens have the libraries they need for the current and future generations.

Respectfully submitted by:
Bill Hudson
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