

Hearing on Senate Bill 1225

Senate Education Committee

Wednesday, September 21, 2011

Testimony of

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I would like to thank Chairman Piccola and Minority Chairman Dinniman for holding this hearing today on Senate Bill 1225, revisions to the Library Code. I would also like to thank Senator Pileggi for his efforts leading to a review of the Library Code and, now, the introduction of this legislation.

My name is Robin L. Leshner and I am the Director of the Adams County Library System in Gettysburg, PA, a position that I've held for the past seven years. I should also note that I have the honor of serving as this year's president of the Pennsylvania Library Association, having been elected by a vote of my fellow members.

I'd like to focus my remarks here as the head of the Adams County Library System. Our system consists of six libraries and a bookmobile and we serve about 100,000 residents in south central Pennsylvania.

The county is traditionally an agricultural economy which is greatly supplemented by a large number of tourists each year. Also impacting library service is the fact that the county is a fast-growing part of the state. Our population has increased close to 33% in 20 years.

I recognize that S.B. 1225 takes positive steps toward a more modern Library Code for Pennsylvania and this is welcome news in the library community. I also expect that the new Library Code will need to address the formula for distributing state funding for libraries and it is this aspect of the code that I wish to address.

First, some brief background. Adams County residents have library service today because of a dedicated library property tax instituted by the County Commissioners in 1995. Since 1995, the County has been the primary local funder of the library system.

Prior to 1995, the library cobbled together government funding from the 34 municipalities of the county. This piecemeal solution of funding was at best, unequal and always insufficient for the delivery of high-quality library services countywide. Library service was concentrated in three population centers which left large portions of the county underserved. Occasional funding windfalls allowed the library system to take some small steps forward, but not in any sustained nor coordinated way.

But perhaps the worst aspect of this funding system was that it was unpredictable. This unpredictability led to inadequate planning which led to gaps in service and inefficiencies.

My point here is that Adams County is an excellent example of greatly improved library services for the public delivered in a more efficient and cost-effective way. After 1995, the Library System was able to rely on stable local funding which allows a library to better plan for the provision of modern library service. One of the positive outcomes of this planning was that the Adams County Library System refocused library services, right-sizing the Headquarters library in Gettysburg while opening three library facilities in underserved regions of the county.

In no small measure, the success of the library system stemmed from incentive funding within the funding formula in the Library Code. This was especially important to us as a small county, and enabled us to fund and deliver better services on a countywide basis.

I recognize that SB 1225 is just the beginning step in reforming Pennsylvania's Library Code. My hope is that the new code will continue the tradition of providing incentives within the county coordination portion of a distribution formula. An incentive formula is one of the best tools that a public library has

to convince county and local funders to support library services. In a small county such as ours, it makes the most sense to make that case at the county level.

County coordinated funding has provided us with a great opportunity to plan for and improve library service for our residents. Based on our experience in Adams County, I urge the committee to insure that the updated Library Code will also include strong incentives for county-based services. It has served us well and, by strengthening our services, we added strength to the cooperative network of library services across the state.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my perspective on issues related to SB 1255. I believe SB 1225 is a good step toward progress and I look forward to working with this committee and the full Senate to produce the best possible bill to benefit all library users across the Commonwealth.

Thank you.