

Testimony of

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Good morning, Chairman Piccola, Democratic Chairman Dinniman, and members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony on behalf of the Pennsylvania Library Association on the bill before the committee, Senate Bill 1225. We are grateful for this time to share our perspective on the ways in which this bill helps to move library services forward, and ways that the bill may be strengthened.

I would also like to thank Senator Pileggi for helping to lead us to this point, first through his resolution that directed a review of the Library Code by the Joint State Government Commission, and subsequently through his sponsorship of S.B. 1225. We applaud his initiative, and we applaud the vision shown by the full Senate in supporting the call for a review of the Library Code, and now through this hearing process in this committee, Mr. Chairman.

Senate Bill 1225 improves the Library Code which, we believe, will help to improve library services for all Pennsylvanians. Among the positive aspects of S.B. 1225:

1. Consolidating the Library Code into one statute so that the Code is easier to understand, revise, and keep current;
2. Strengthening the role of the Advisory Council on Library Development by involving more professional librarians as members;
3. Modernizing service standards to reflect the increased role of technology and electronic resources;
4. Formalizing the role of Deputy Secretary for Libraries as the State Librarian, and empowering the State Librarian to enforce standards in a more flexible manner including moving away from an all-or-nothing option related to the distribution of state funding;
5. Bolstering professionalism by enabling the State Librarian to broaden continuing education requirements for library employees.

These provisions should help to improve and modernize the structure of library services at the state level.

As members of this committee know, the hard work of the Joint State Government Commission is reflected throughout SB 1225. On a very demanding timeline, the Commission's staff did an excellent job reviewing the Library Code and presenting their findings and recommendations. We were pleased to see that many of the recommendations in the JSGC's report have been included in SB 1225.

In addition to their primary recommendations, the Commission added some recommendations in areas that they believed require further deliberation by the General Assembly. We commend these ideas to your attention and find them to be greatly in harmony with values that our association shared with the Commission during their review of the Code. It is the hope of our membership that a modernized Library Code will:

1. Establish clearly the primary responsibility for funding, either state or local;
2. Expand local revenue options beyond the property tax alone;
3. Maximize state dollars by using them to leverage greater local funding;
4. Expand state funding to insure basic services as well as the most cost-effective resources statewide; and
5. Encourage local library consolidation as well as a greater focus on county-based and regional cooperation.

Some of these issues—and others beyond this list—may be appropriate to include in a modernized Library Code, or they may be more appropriately addressed through regulations. In either case, the Pennsylvania Library Association and our 1600 members stand ready to provide any expertise and assistance that the Senate may require.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, Pennsylvania's libraries are a tremendous asset to the Commonwealth. Nearly 6 million of our fellow citizens hold library cards. But they don't just hold them. They use them. Our public libraries welcomed more than 40 million visitors and the number of virtual library customers—those who use libraries over the Internet—exceeded 13 million, and that was several years ago. In just one year, our libraries conducted more than 179,000 programs, engaged the minds of 260,000 kids who participated in library summer reading programs, and assisted more than 303,000 jobseekers.

Senate Bill 1225 takes some positive steps toward improving Pennsylvania's library services. We are grateful for this first step and pledge to work closely with you, Mr. Chairman, and with all of your colleagues to craft the best possible bill that will lead to the best possible library services for all of your constituents.

But, in conclusion, I would be remiss if, on behalf of our members, I did not briefly communicate to this committee the most serious problem faced by libraries—inadequate and unpredictable funding. We agree that the Library Code needs to be modernized and we support this effort. But make no mistake; our most severe problem continues to be funding, particularly poor local funding in too many places across Pennsylvania.

Just consider: On a per capita basis, Pennsylvania ranks 39th **nationally** in overall funding. But when you break this number down, you quickly see the root of our problem: we rank 47th in the country in local funding for libraries. The state's investment in library services remains high—fourth in the nation on a per capita basis—but state cuts in 2009 and 2010 totaling more than 37%, and deep cuts dating back to 2003 have meant that the library funding formula in the Library Code has been frozen since 2003. This formula includes incentives to improve local funding—our most serious problem—but such incentives have been off-line for nearly a decade now.

I call this problem to the committee's attention with the hope that as we make improvements to the Library Code through Senate Bill 1225, we'll also move as quickly as possible to restore state funding which, in turn, will revitalize services and resources that are most cost-effectively purchased at the state level, and will also restore badly needed incentives for local funding.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, Pennsylvania's libraries have moved far beyond just being book repositories. They're agile institutions serving real-life needs. Libraries can be key to powering progress, improving literacy, and elevating the quality of life all across Pennsylvania. A modernized Library Code—and restored funding—can help move us in the right direction.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify, and I'd be happy to try and answer any questions you may have.