

Testimony before the House Committee on Taxation

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Good Afternoon. Thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony. My name is Carol Barta, and I serve as the Assistant Director of the North Central Kansas Libraries System headquartered in Manhattan. I am speaking today in opposition to HB 2719.

In 1966, our fathers generation, those who fought in World War II and presided over an expansive peace-time economy, saw the value of creating a network to enable the sharing of resources across the state. They set up the seven regional library systems in order to make possible access to material regardless of whether one lived in Topeka or Kismet.

One of the basic reasons the systems were organized was to compensate municipal libraries for providing service to people from outlying rural areas. Libraries belonging to the regional library systems are required by statute to serve everyone living in their region. The regional library systems tax the rural land that is not taxed by a municipal library and funnel that tax money to the libraries through grants, material, services and shared costs. This allows rural children to participate in summer reading programs and residents with no access to the Internet at their home to be able to do business with agencies that no longer have brick and mortar offices. If regional library systems are no longer able to levy this tax, municipal libraries will have no incentive to serve people living outside their taxing boundaries.

Small communities struggle to provide services for their residents. 32.4 % of libraries in Kansas have budgets less than \$20,000. These libraries cannot survive without grants and professional services from the regional library systems. 48 communities could lose their libraries; 58 more would be at risk. One of them is Vermillion Public library. Vermillion receives a levy under \$3000 from their city. They are able to leverage another \$3200 in grants money from the system most years as well as assistance with e-rate filing and computer technical support. They provide access to the Internet, school library support and lots of good reading for a community of about 100.

NCKLS is proud to offer support to libraries serving the military families of Ft. Riley. From the Post Library to the public libraries in Geary, Clay, Dickinson, Morris and Riley counties—17 libraries in all serve these families. The regional library system helps with grants, programs and services.

In recent years the all of the regional library systems have created shared library catalogs to facilitate sharing material on interlibrary loan. Without the regional library systems to maintain these catalogs, libraries might no longer have access to their records, or might have to purchase services on their own. The regional library systems also underwrite the courier delivery service which minimizes the cost of sending books back and forth to borrowing libraries. Sharing keeps everyone's mill levy lower, because we avoid the cost of purchasing every new book that someone might want to read.

One of the most important services that the regional library systems provide is computer support. Most small towns have no one to call on to repair computers and printers or train them on new software. Small libraries lack the budget to hire someone with that expertise. The regional library systems employ computer technicians who can help the librarians learn how to better utilize the equipment as well as troubleshoot computers.

Many small libraries are not able to hire trained librarians. Salaries start at minimum wage for directors of small libraries. The regional library systems employ professionally trained librarians who in turn train those working in the rural libraries on the best practices for running a library. That includes sessions on how to run successful summer reading programs, how to select books your patrons will like and how to work with the library board to create good library policies. We also work with the boards on hiring and firing staff and other human resource issues.

Kansas' regional library systems enable even the smallest of libraries to operate at a professional level. The mission is to provide every Kansan with access to the information, educational resources and even the entertainment they want and need regardless of their geographic location.

By requiring a vote on a general or special election ballot, HB 2719 would make it virtually impossible for municipalities to plan for adequate funding for their libraries. They would never be certain of the availability of grant funds or services that have been routinely provided by the regional library systems. This bill has the potential to cause great harm to a network of resource sharing that has proven to be fiscally responsible. I ask you to vote in opposition to HB 2729