

Monday March 14, 2016

Dear Mr. Chairman,

My name is Matt Nojonen, I have been the Director of the Leavenworth Public Library since 2014.

I thank you and the Committee for your time. I hope my few words will help you make a decision that will prevent serious damage to the Leavenworth Public Library and the thousands of families we serve.

HB2719 caps funding for regional library systems at .75 mills. That cap would cut funding for our regional library, the Northeast Kansas Library System (NEKLS) by 46% (\$790,000).

HB2719 would force NEKLS to run an annual special election in 11 counties to maintain their remaining funding. They would bear the full cost of every election, wasting money that voters intended to provide library services. If an election failed, the bill provides no recourse. NEKLS would lose its funding and cease to exist. If NEKLS ceases to exist, the Leavenworth Public Library as our community knows it would cease to exist.

There are vital services that we cannot provide without joining forces with other libraries through NEKLS. Last year our patrons borrowed 26,000 items from other libraries and we loaned over 16,000 of our items to other libraries. Thanks to NEKLS, we are blessed with a daily delivery service at the incredibly low cost of 4 cents per item in 2015.

We share the expense of our catalog/circulation technology with other libraries through NEKLS. This reduces our annual cost to \$5,000. That amount has not increased in years. Buying our own system would cost a minimum of \$100,000 and we would pay anywhere from \$15-20,000 every year to renew the software license.

HB 2719 also puts our local funding at risk. Voters in Leavenworth approved a Charter Ordinance to fund their library over 100 years ago. Current legislation (KS 12-1220) states that our municipality "shall" provide funding through the voter approved Charter Ordinance. HB 2719 changes that to "may." Essentially, the City Commission could decide to cut off our funding completely. Unlikely? Today I would say yes. Over the coming years? Who knows? What is certain is the bill makes that risk a possibility forever.

If HB 2179 passes and the NEKLS regional library loses 46% of their funding, the Leavenworth Public Library will have no choice but to ask the City Commission to make up the difference with a significant increase in our local mill rate. That rate has not gone up in 30 years. The alternative would be to cut hours, collections, staff and services.

We have weathered some bad times and remained intact. If HB 2179 passes, that will change immediately and dramatically. The bill will manage to do with a stroke of a pen what years of a bad economy failed to do: force a local tax increase or force cuts so deep that the first public library in the first city in the State of Kansas, an institution proudly supported by its community since 1899, will become a sad shadow of itself.

On behalf of the community of Leavenworth, I urge you and your Committee to vote no on HB 2179.

Sincerely,

Matt Nojonen
Director
Leavenworth Public Library