

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Senate Bill No. 153, creating an exemption for public libraries to the Personal and Family Protection Act, which opened the doors of many of our public libraries to persons carrying concealed weapons.

I am the director of the Bonner Springs City Library. Last month I was part of a group of librarians who came to the capitol to visit with legislators about issues of importance to our libraries. One of our chief concerns was local control. We asked our legislators to join us in supporting the preservation of local authority on the part of library boards and municipalities as it relates to decisions regarding the programs, services, and operation of local libraries.

The issue of allowing concealed weapons in public libraries is a good example of how important local control is to us.

Until recently I worked in an urban setting in Kansas, where, as in most of our nation's big cities, guns and gun violence were all too present in the lives of young people. I heard those troubling stories often. At one point someone brought me a poem written by a young teen; it dealt with guns and violence in the author's neighborhood and concluded by calling the public library her refuge. Over the years, I heard variations on this idea of the library as a safe place from many of her peers.

I now find myself working in a quiet community of 7,500 people. In Bonner Springs we put a great emphasis on services to children and their families. Last year we offered 317 children's programs with 10,890 in attendance. This represents 89% of our overall programming activity. We circulated 70,849 children's items, representing 48% of our overall circulation. Our library is full of kids all the time.

The same arguments that have convinced us to keep guns out of our K-12 schools should pertain in a library such as ours.

As different as my experiences have been in a large urban and a small town setting, both of the public libraries where I have worked took the same institutional position on guns, construing the library as a gun-free zone as long as they were able to do so and seeking the temporary exemption after the recent gun legislation was passed.

I urge you to support this bill that would allow public libraries to continue operating on the principles that have long guided local decision makers—our library boards and our city councils—in their effort to create safe places for the children in our communities.

Jack Granath, Director
Bonner Springs City Library