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January 30, 2024

House Bill 2176 Creating the Arkansas City area public library district act and the Udall area public library district act, requiring an election for the creation of such district and authorizing unified school districts No. 470 and 463 to levy a tax on behalf of such library districts.

Neutral testimony

Senate Committee on Local Government

Senator Carolyn McGinn, Chair
Senator Elaine Bowers, Vice Chair
Senator Marci Francisco, Ranking Minority Member
Senator John Doll, Member
Senator Oletha Faust-Goudeau, Member
Senator David Haley, member
Senator Ronald Rykman, Member
Senator Tim Shallenburger, Member
Senator Alicia Straub, Member
Senator Mike Thompson, Member

The seven regional library systems in Kansas provide vital support to over 300 public libraries, school libraries in Kansas' 287 school districts, libraries at the state's 32 higher education institutions, and special libraries across Kansas. This support, which varies from system to system, includes direct financial grants-in-aid, as well as consulting, human resources, education and training, technology services, and collections assistance both print and digital. The cooperative and collaborative nature of the regional library systems allows for better purchasing power and helps tax dollars to go farther than that of just one entity.

Regional library systems are funded with a rural tax levy on those properties within the system's geographical territory that are so rural they do not pay a local library tax. Those rural citizens are then able to use all member libraries within that System without charge. This reciprocal balance has worked very well across Kansas since the 1960s and does still to this day.

Statute allows for libraries in cities of the first class to seek legislation to establish a special district library, which is what HB 2176 proposes. Udall Public Library is in a city of the third class, was not aware that that K.S.A. 12-1236 authorizes, "Any one or more cities of the third class is hereby authorized to join with any one or more townships or portions of one or more townships in one or more counties in the creation of a library district, upon the presentation to the board of county commissioners, of the county in which such proposed library district is located, of a petition setting forth the boundaries of the proposed library district and requesting the formation of such library district." Because of existing legislation, the Udall Public Library does not need to pursue change in legislation to establish themselves as a district library.

Serving the counties of Barton, Cloud, Ellis, Ellsworth, Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, Ottawa, Pawnee, Phillips, Republic, Rooks, Rush, Russell, Saline & Smith

Establishing a district library through legislation or at a local level reduces the taxing area of the system. If multiple libraries within a system determine to form district libraries, and still want to receive full system services, including grants-in-aid, this increases the tax burden on those rural taxpayers residing within the System's geographic footprint.

Historically, a system mill levy is lower than that of a public library. The South Central Kansas Library System, of which Arkansas City and Udall libraries are members, has a mill of 1.061. The mill for the Arkansas City Library is 5.409 and the Udall City Library is 6.723. This would be a significant increase in tax burden to those rural residents. And while HB 2176 would increase funding to two libraries, it will have a negative fiscal impact on the other 143 member libraries of the South Central Kansas Library System. Additionally, it clears the way for other public libraries in Kansas to seek changes in legislation to form district libraries, therefore upsetting the proven reciprocal balance that exists between libraries and regional library systems.

Prepared on behalf of the Central Kansas Library System Board and Executive Board by Gail Santy, Director, Central Kansas Library System, gsanty@ckls.org, 800-362-2642, ext. 107.