



North Dakota Library Association
Established 1906

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

March 1, 2017

A Perfect Storm is Brewing

The legislative session reconvenes today as legislators return from their brief crossover recess. The second half of the session will be almost entirely dominated by budget matters.

Next week, Moody's Analytics will present their revised revenue forecast. It is already expected to be, in the words of many experts, "abysmal." Lawmakers will base their fiscal decisions based on this forecast. With oil production flat and the agriculture markets in a prolonged slump, these decisions will have far-reaching and likely long-term ramifications.

Like all publicly financed institutions, libraries (public, school, and college/university) will not be spared from the budget knife. This does not surprise anyone. However, when you couple this reality with perceptions by some that libraries are antiquated, even unnecessary, and when you add into the equation the certainty of major federal budget cuts, public libraries are facing a potential perfect storm.

To be even more direct: *The next two months may be consequential to the future of North Dakota's public and school libraries.*

Engagement Has Never Been More Important

Now, more than ever, it is imperative that NDLA members engage with their legislators.

One of the silver linings for the library community is that matters of particular importance to us are now being considered in the State Senate, where it is far easier to engage 47 members, rather than 94.

Our basic legislative strategy for the second half is defensive. We want to hold what gains we've made over the years and prevent any further erosion to support for libraries. Our focus needs to be on engaging all state senators: To be in their in-boxes, to be visible within the Capitol, to be seen and heard.

NDLA's Top Priorities

Your legislative team is currently focused on the following two bills during the second half of the legislative session.

- **SB 1013: State Library Budget and State Aid**

The House has recommended a 13% budget cut for the State Library, as well as the elimination of a currently vacant position and major cuts to state aid to public libraries. At present, the State Library's two vacant positions are the Digitization Librarian and the School and Youth Services Specialist. Both positions are important to the state's library community as they provide hands-on, specialized training and coordination.

The State Library is asking for letters of support addressing how these positions impact your library, and support of full funding for state aid. Please request that the legislators support the bill as originally introduced by reinstating \$295,472 to State Aid and 1.0 FTE to the State Library Budget. Please send all letters via mail or email to State Librarian Mary Soucie **by Monday, March 6**. Please address your letters to Senator Ray Holmberg, Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee.

State aid to public libraries is necessary revenue for our budgets. This funding has already been cut by 18% from the last session. Public libraries are strongly encouraged to share letters of support demonstrating how State Aid positively impacts your communities.

- **SB 1361: Placing a Three Percent Cap on Budget Increases by Local Governments**

SB 1361 would cap any budget increases by local governments and school districts to three percent (3%) per year. Simply put, this bill would tie the hands of local elected officials. Cities and school districts will have their revenue raising options limited and will likely have to make cuts to services such as libraries. As we, along with many other organizations, see it, it is heavy-handed state government at its very best and micro-management at its worst.

⇒ ***NDLA's Main Argument:*** *This is about local control. The current cap of 12 percent should be left in place.*

The Senate Finance and Taxation Committee will hear testimony on SB 1361 at a date yet to be scheduled. Please send email messages now to the following members of the committee and your own state senators. Contact information for members of the Senate Finance and Taxation Committee is listed below.

Senator Dwight Cook, Chairman – District 34 (R)

dcook@nd.gov

Senator Brad Bekkedahl, Vice Chairman – District 1 (R)

bbekkedahl@nd.gov

Senator Lonnie Laffen – District 43 (R)

llaffen@nd.gov

Senator Scott Meyer – District 18 (R)

scottmeyer@nd.gov

Senator Jessica Unruh – District 33 (R)

jkunruh@nd.gov

Senator Jim Dotzenrod – District 26 (D)

idotzenrod@nd.gov

Have further questions, comments, ideas, or want to get involved?

Contact Christine Kujawa, Bismarck Public Library, at ckujawa@bismarcklibrary.org or Janet Anderson, Minot Public Library, at janet.anderson@minotnd.org.