

Sandra Conrady

House Appropriations Committee

Public Testimony on HB203

January 22, 2013

Chairman Ankney and members of the Committee;

For the record, my name is Sandra Conrady (C O N R A D Y) and I currently serve as Vice-Chair of the Lewis & Clark Library Board of Trustees and have served on the Board since 2004. I am also a member of the Montana Library Association and an avid library user.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today.

Library trustees are community volunteers from all walks of life charged with enormous responsibility. It is crucial that trustees understand Montana Library Law, budget and policy. I was part of the Library Board Education Training Program, a mentoring program that was provided through the State Library. I traveled the state providing training for local library trustees. As I traveled throughout the state I realized how invaluable this training was to local boards that were committed to providing strong leadership.

I also had the opportunity to learn about the challenges our small, rural libraries are facing, particularly during the economic downturn and now we are working to recover. Library budgets at the local level have declined or remained flat, although costs for materials, equipment, supplies and operations have risen.

The additional funds provided through direct per capita/per square mile state aid are desperately needed. I can recall a visit to the Denton Library and at that time the librarian also served as Clerk and Recorder. Funds were not sufficient to separate the duties and the library generally took the back seat. This was a library that had the potential to be the cultural center of the community with it's programming.

On November of last year the Missoulian reported the dire financial straits of the William K. Kohrs Memorial Library in Deer Lodge. The director resigned because she felt it important to free up some money so that it could be applied to purchase of library materials for the collection. It relieved some of the financial pressure, although only temporarily.

When I was a little girl, and some of you can remember with me, the cost of a postage stamp was three cents. Look where we are today with the cost of a stamp is now forty-five cents with another increase coming soon. As we all know, Inflation has reduced the buying power of the dollar. Unfortunately our direct state aid to libraries has not kept up with inflation, in fact, has pretty well lost the race. We now have an opportunity to get us back on track.

In the big picture of the state budget, the library portion is modest. But these modest dollars invested in libraries today pay big, big dividends.

I urge you to vote "do pass" on HB203. With the Chair's permission, I submit my written testimony for the record.

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