

Governor’s Advisory Council on Library Development

Priorities and Recommendations for Pennsylvania Libraries

April 2015

The Governor’s Advisory Council (GAC) on Library Development comprises 12 members appointed by the Governor to represent the community at large. The composition is six professional librarians, three trustees of local public libraries, and three laypeople. It is an innovative group that leverages the members’ extensive knowledge and understanding of library services, library patrons, library personnel, library policy, and Pennsylvania politics to design and effectively advocate for solutions that serve all Commonwealth residents.

This document, prepared by the GAC, articulates the vital importance of libraries and highlights the five areas of focus that the GAC believes must be addressed to ensure that all Pennsylvanians have access—through libraries—to the resources they need to be successful.

Council Members

Cynthia K. Richey, Chair	Professional appt.	Director, Mt. Lebanon Public Library, Pittsburgh
Mary O. Garm, Vice Chair	Professional appt.	Administrator, Lackawanna County Library System
David Belanger	Professional appt.	Director, Delaware County Library System
Marsha Everton	Trustee appt.	Principal, AIMsights Group; Trustee, York Co. Library System
Robert Gallivan	Lay appt.	Retired research chemist, Erie
Louis W. LaBar, MBA, EA	Trustee appt.	Trustee, Wayne Co. Public Library/Wayne Library Authority
Allison Mackley	Professional appt.	Teacher-Librarian, Hershey High School
Sharon McRae	Professional appt.	Director, Shaler North Hills Library, Glenshaw
David Mitchell	Lay appt.	Retired school librarian and county councilman
Dr. Larry Nesbit	Lay appt.	Retired director of Mansfield University Library

PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES: A PORTAL TO OPPORTUNITY

Libraries power progress in Pennsylvania. No other educational institution does so much for people of all ages, backgrounds, and circumstances—and does it as cost-effectively—as the library. Libraries develop and support intellectual and social capital. Libraries are leading Pennsylvania forward with a vision that demonstrates a unique combination of new technology, community access, and commitment to learning.

Jobs That Pay

Libraries are key drivers in a community's success, educating residents in basic literacies, supporting the development of a skilled, trained workforce, and connecting that workforce with employers. Library services result in jobs that pay, a growing economy, and expanded opportunity.

Libraries bridge the digital divide by providing free access to computers and vast data networks. Pennsylvania's unemployed and under-employed residents turn to libraries every day to learn job-seeking skills and to find job resources. Most resources are now available online, but not every job seeker has personal access to the Internet.

Strategic investment in libraries provides opportunities for all residents to learn 21st Century skills and literacies that connect them to the world of information and ideas. Pennsylvania's libraries stretch precious public resources and create economic opportunity through sharing.

Schools That Teach

Libraries are essential partners in creating schools that truly teach in a complex era that requires new skills. Libraries collaborate with Pennsylvania's schools at every stage, helping students navigate all forms of media and developing lifelong learning habits through and beyond the formal education years.

Libraries are a vital catalyst in the life-cycle of learning. Public libraries play a crucial role in the education of Pennsylvania's residents—from early childhood and Pre-K through K-12 education, to higher education, and on to independent lifelong learning for adults. Pennsylvania's public libraries provide critical training and education in early literacy for young children and their parents and support early literacy skills that prepare children for success in school. State support of all libraries—public, school and academic—ensures that students of every age have the opportunity to participate fully in our connected society and global economy.

Government That Works

Pennsylvania's libraries have always played a crucial role in our democratic society, a role that has become even more fundamental in a knowledge-based democracy. Libraries help our citizens participate and contribute effectively to their communities, government, and civil society. People turn to libraries because the information and services they provide are trustworthy, unbiased, and uncensored. Government we can trust starts with citizens who connect through knowledge and discourse. As the most democratic of public institutions, libraries provide access, context, space, a trusted platform, and inspiration.

As technology redefines literacy, public libraries are a strong strand in the social safety net. They ensure access to tools and skills for the new, networked era while remaining rooted in the communities that they serve.

Priorities of the Governor's Advisory Council on Library Development (GAC)

The GAC has identified five Pennsylvania Library Priorities that correspond to and advance the new administration's agenda in order to help the Commonwealth achieve its goals. They are:

- Restore and improve support for the Public Library Subsidy
- Ensure that every public school student has access to a school library with a qualified school librarian
- Restore and improve support for POWER Library
- Redesign and update The Library Code for the 21st Century
- Restore and improve support for and continue to invest in the State Library of Pennsylvania

Restore and Improve Funding of the Public Library Subsidy

In an era when the public is demanding greater efficiency and program consolidation at all levels of government, Pennsylvania's libraries serve as models of cost-effective service. Libraries stretch the public's resources by sharing books, computers, online resources, and expertise. By their very definition, libraries serve the public broadly and efficiently.

Yet, much potential remains for libraries to do even greater things to prepare Pennsylvanians to compete successfully in the 21st Century labor force and to live healthy, productive lives. Public libraries – properly leveraged – can help solve some of the Commonwealth's biggest economic and social problems.

Libraries have seen increased demand for access to technology and digital resources, along with traditional library materials, as residents of the Commonwealth have struggled with a faltering economy over many years. The cost to provide these valuable services increases annually, even as library budgets have been reduced.

In 2008, the Public Library Subsidy was reduced to \$53,507,000, a cut of 35% from the previous year. The Subsidy has been level-funded in every year since then. At the same time, funding from local municipalities has also declined.

Historically, Pennsylvania's local governments have provided some of the lowest funding in the nation, ranking 46th in 2012. The state's funding formula for public libraries was designed to provide municipalities with an incentive for investment in local library service, while, at the same time, raising library standards across the state. Due to insufficient state funds, the formula has not been run since 2003, and local municipalities have lost their incentive to maintain or improve support of libraries.

ACTION NEEDED:

The Governor's Advisory Council on Library Development recommends that the Public Library Subsidy be funded at a level that ensures that all Pennsylvanians have equal access to resources that will help them reach their greatest potential and meet the demands of 21st Century life. Public libraries are required to raise and spend \$5 per capita in local support each year in order to participate in the State Aid program. It is recommended that the State match that \$5 per capita, investing an additional \$37,000,000 in the Public Library Subsidy.

Ensure That Every Public School Student Has Access to a School Library with a Qualified School Librarian

Students in every school deserve a Library Science K-12-certified school librarian who is a trained expert in teaching key competencies. As a teacher, the school librarian empowers students to become critical thinkers, capable readers, skillful researchers, and ethical users of information. In addition, qualified school librarians have a unique knowledge of curriculum needs and a broad knowledge of the available resources and technology.

Over the past twenty years, national and Pennsylvania-specific research has repeatedly demonstrated a strong connection between effective school library programs staffed by qualified school librarians and improved academic performance. The study completed in Pennsylvania demonstrates increased PSSA Reading and Writing scores, especially for the most at-risk students, thereby helping to reduce the achievement gap.

Data show that in Pennsylvania public schools, the number of school library positions are in steep decline. Since 2012, 259 professional school librarian positions have been eliminated with only forty-four being restored in subsequent years. This decrease has a negative impact on more than 34,488 Pennsylvania students. It does not take into account that in one of every six school districts in Pennsylvania, there is only one full-time or part-time

certified school librarian serving the entire district. A growing number of districts no longer have functioning libraries in their schools, including the School District of Philadelphia with only 11 school librarians in its 249 buildings.

No state or federal funding is dedicated to school libraries. When state funding for general education is cut, school libraries are targeted as a potential solution for stressed budgets. This exacerbates the inequities of school library services not only between schools but also within school districts.

ACTION NEEDED:

The future of Pennsylvania depends upon the children we educate today. Both school librarians and school libraries are vital to educating today's children to ensure a bright future. The Governor's Advisory Council on Library Development strongly supports the following actions: (1) to develop state requirements to require full-time qualified school librarians in every school library and (2) to develop a budget line item to ensure that state funding is used to support school library services and professional staffing.

Restore and Improve Support for POWER Library

Labeled "Library Access" in the Commonwealth's budget, POWER Library (www.powerlibrary.org) is the online portal to digital resources for users of all public, school, and academic libraries in the Commonwealth. Pennsylvania residents of all ages enjoy free 24/7 access to newspapers, magazines, journals, historical documents and photos, online databases, and eBooks from their home, their school, their library or their workplace. Residents may request assistance from a librarian or request that books and other materials be sent to their local library

In the FY2009-10 Commonwealth budget, funding for "Library Access" and the "Statewide Catalog" programs were merged and reduced from \$11 million to \$3 million, a 72% reduction in funding. The FY2013-14 budget restored a modest \$500,000 to the new line item. The infrastructure of POWER Library comprises five interrelated programs that have served as a model of cooperation across all libraries. These programs, all designed to champion PA residents through quality information, have stagnated or declined.

The reduction in funding has resulted in decreased access to resources and instability in the services provided from year to year. There is a growing inequality in availability of online resources, as libraries in wealthier communities purchase discontinued state resources with local funds, while poorer communities make do without.

ACTION NEEDED:

The Governor's Advisory Council on Library Development recommends an increase in state funding for the five programs that make up POWER Library, identified in the state budget as "Library Access." The recommended increase would add \$4,565,000 to Governor Wolf's proposal of \$2,821,000, for a total of \$7,386,000.

Redesign and Update The Library Code for the 21st Century

The Public Library Code dates from 1961, and there have been few substantive changes since then, despite a modest update in 2012. The update focused mainly on cleaning up language and removing obsolete information. However, the changes were not internally consistent, nor did they address larger issues that cause conflict for local libraries in how they interact with their communities and receive appropriate local financial support. The Code remains outdated and unresponsive to the changing needs of the public for library services. In addition, the current formula for State Aid, which springs from the Code, has not been implemented in more than a decade,

due to insufficient state funding, and it requires significant reworking to bring it into line with current library practices.

There is a critical need to overhaul the more than 50-year-old Code and attendant Regulations in order to support public libraries in the 21st century and ensure that they can and do serve the public effectively and efficiently. Changes in technology and the delivery of information require a Code that is flexible enough to guide libraries as they respond to changes and adapt to the needs of their own communities and all Commonwealth residents, while encouraging innovation and creativity. The Code should also be a leadership tool, helping to create exceptional libraries in Pennsylvania.

ACTION NEEDED:

The Governor's Advisory Council on Library Development recommends that a process be undertaken to envision the future of public libraries in Pennsylvania, leading to the development of a new Library Code, an evaluation of current library structures and funding, and updated standards suitable for 21st century libraries. The GAC welcomes the opportunity to lead this effort.

Restore and Improve Support for and Continue to Invest in the State Library of Pennsylvania

The State Library of Pennsylvania is a dynamic cultural hub that collects and preserves vital resources, and connects people, libraries, and government with the resources and tools essential to building a strong Pennsylvania.

The State Library was founded in 1745 when Benjamin Franklin purchased a set of English Statutes at Large for the Assembly to use as a reference set in formulating laws for the colony. Since then, the State Library has amassed an extraordinary collection of more than 4 million items.

Pennsylvania must continue to invest in the State Library to ensure that there is future access to the materials that tell the story of our state and nation. In FY2009-10, the State Library's budget was cut from \$4,784,000 to \$2,372,000, which included the elimination of 50 staff members. The loss of staff caused a dramatic reduction in the number of hours the library can be open to the public, and it severely diminished the ability of staff to adequately collect, manage, preserve, and create effective access to materials. The Rare Collection Room in the State Library is a state-of-the-art model of document preservation, but current funding levels do not allow for maintenance of the high-tech systems installed there nor for the care and repair of Pennsylvania's rarest historical documents.

There are currently only 15 staff members to care for and provide access to the collection of state and federal documents. Since 2011, the State Library budget has remained at \$1.9 million, which is woefully inadequate for such an important cultural and historical institution, and, indeed, a negative reflection on the educational priorities of the Commonwealth.

ACTION NEEDED:

The Governor's Advisory Council on Library Development recommends an increase in the State Library's budget that will allow for 10 additional library staff members, along with required Capitol Police presence on weekends. The GAC further recommends the formation of a foundation that can bring together private partners to support large projects that enhance the ability of the State Library to create new, efficient, and innovative access to collections.