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Testimony before the Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on HB 5022

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Dear Chairpersons and Joint Ways & Means Legislative Committee Members,

I worked as the Oregon State Library's Government Research Services (GRS) Online Services Librarian for four years before moving to a new position as a policy analyst and researcher for another State of Oregon agency in March of this year. In my role as a librarian for GRS I coordinated the development of information and service delivery through websites and other tools, administered the Oregon.gov search engine, and provided reference services for state agencies and the legislature. As a former reference librarian for GRS I am specifically offering testimony as a concerned citizen and information professional to address two assumptions I have encountered in previous committee meeting materials and testimony.

The first of these assumptions is that GRS staff performs research for state agencies and it is incorrect. I believe this assumption comes from a misunderstanding of library reference service. Much of the research conducted by state agency staff involves consulting, interacting with, and combining information from multiple sources to reach conclusions and make decisions for their agencies. The results of these research activities include reports, legislation, rulings, or new policies and practices. GRS does not perform any of these activities on behalf of state agencies. GRS does not write the reports, develop new policies, or even read research articles on behalf of state agency patrons. As the provider of reference services, the role of GRS is to use their professional expertise in finding and evaluating information sources in response to research questions and ensure that the information used by Oregon government in their research is of the highest quality and currency. GRS staff finds and delivers these materials to patrons in response to their research questions, but the research work and the creation of research products is solely the responsibility of the requesting agency. As a librarian I frequently noticed materials from the research assistance I provided appearing in the press or in testimony before the legislature. While I took pride to see my work being used, I always knew the actions taken by agency patrons was based on their research, work, and deliberations and not from any one piece of information I directed them to.

The second assumption I would like to address is that in this time of "everything being online" state employees can simply access all of the information they need for their research from their desktop computers. I actually agree with that assumption, but not in a state government that does not include an adequately funded and staffed GRS division. While it is true that a great deal of information is online, much of it the information needed by state agencies to make evidence based decisions resides in journals requiring expensive subscriptions. The need for state agency access to this material is

evidenced by their thousands of annual database logins and document delivery requests for GRS print and electronic information. In many cases important material relevant to state agencies is not available through simple internet searching or an electronic source. Determining when the first automobile death occurred in Oregon, the history of a particular Columbia Gorge tract of land that might provide a clue to present-day soil containments, or even who was the longest serving member of the Oregon Legislature requires a consultation with a combination of sources that may include those that only reside in the stacks of the Oregon State Library and require the expert knowledge of library staff to navigate. GRS staff organizes and uses the largest collection of Oregon State published documents in the world which is supplemented by materials determined by GRS as pertinent to the current and future information needs of Oregon government. I suggest that before the committee embarks on reorganizing or eliminating GRS services or the Oregon State Library's collection that they provide the same thoughtful consideration to the information needs of state government that GRS staff provides each day by allowing opportunities for direct communication with this committee regarding the future of their work and the collection they work with.

Because I'm still a librarian at heart I am providing some additional resources for your consideration:

Definitions of Library Reference Service

American Library Association:

<http://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/definitionsreference>

Rutgers University Library:

http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/about/pub_serv_policies/pspm_02.shtml

Oregon State Library Collection Information

Presentation on Oregon State Library Special Collections:

<http://www.nwcentral.org/files/Special%20Collections%20at%20OSL%202.ppt>

Oregon State Library Oregon Documents Repository Centennial Website:

<http://wayback.archive-it.org/2979/20130402215324/http://library.state.or.us/home/Centennial/index.html>

Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony.

Sincerely,

Brian McGuirk

