

March 18, 2019

House Committee On Economic Development
900 Court St. NE - HR D
Salem, OR 97301

Re: HB 2243- Relating to public libraries

Chair Lively and members of the Committee, I am Vailey Oehlke, Director of Libraries for Multnomah County Library. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 2243.

Across Oregon and the United States, public libraries are a vital and singular civic institution. In urban, suburban and rural communities, the public library provides access to knowledge, resources, information and services to every person, regardless of status, beliefs, or affiliation. Public libraries are a living manifestation of our social compact, combining the resources of a society to offer freely to everyone, to bolster learning, enjoyment, growth and economic development. Public libraries are an investment in the common good and they benefit us all.

Unfortunately, some communities in Oregon have been subjected to divestment from that common purpose. In those communities, some residents have tried valiantly to save their beloved public libraries, cobbling together volunteers' time, available space, and limited materials. Others have formed new, voter-approved public libraries. While economic challenges require difficult tradeoffs, a public library should require public investment as the foundation of its mission of service.

A public library is so much more than a building with books. Instead, it's a place where children receive critical support for early learning; programs and curricula are designed with specific outcomes in mind; the doors to information and reliable free technology are held open; and highly trained experts offer access and assistance to everyone.

On behalf of Multnomah County Library and as a former president of the Public Library Association, I urge the Committee to support House Bill 2243 and affirm the collective benefit of public libraries by assigning clear minimum conditions around public funding, open hours and the structural support to help libraries better serve communities across Oregon.

Thank you,



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