



IOWA CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Libraries have been public institutions in Iowa since 1863, when citizens established the first free public library in Keokuk. Since then, Iowans have supported libraries across the state as key community centers governed by local citizens. Several politicians in the Iowa Legislature want to strip the authority of public citizens to manage their libraries by eliminating public vote on referenda and transferring all library decisions and properties to city councils.

Under current state law, voluntary Trustees, appointed by city councils, set library bylaws, hire library directors, and oversee funds collected for public library use. Major changes to library operations or bylaws are voted on by local citizens. The proposals now before the Legislature (HSB678, SSB3168) would entirely eliminate the traditional local citizen oversight of library operations, transferring it to city councils. There would be no more public referenda on library matters and no longer independent citizen trustees to guide the libraries.

City councils and public libraries already cooperate to manage library finances and to appoint library directors and citizen trustees. In situations of conflict, either the Council or the Library Board can call upon state mediators for reconciliation. The drastic proposal to eliminate the public's participation in library funding and liquidating citizen-based Boards of Trustees is unnecessary at best, and at worst becomes a slippery slope for politicizing libraries as politicians replace citizen trustees as overseers. Citizen voters in Pella and other communities have already rejected the very changes now being considered by the legislature.

The proposed legislation centralizes power and lacks the checks and balances that since 1787 have characterized American democracy. Moreover, Iowa city councils have neither the time nor expertise to add public libraries to their already substantial portfolio of responsibilities. Tell your legislators to oppose HSB678 and SSB3168. We urge Iowa citizens to resist this centralizing political scheme and to sustain the self-governing traditions of the free public libraries that grace our state.

Adopted and approved by the Iowa City Public Library Board of Trustees on February 29, 2024.