



Update the Definition for Public Library Today – Get Ready for Tomorrow! Support HB 2243

PROBLEM: The current statutory definition of “Public Library” is outdated and in need of revision to better reflect the changing landscape of libraries and to ensure exceptional public library services for all Oregonians.

SOLUTION: Amend the current definition of “Public Library” to reflect “free and equal access to library and information services for all residents,” and to direct the State Library Board to establish minimum criteria for the formation and maintenance of Oregon’s public libraries. These standards must address financial support from public funds as well as regularly scheduled hours, and are to take into account the library’s service population when implementing.

Why is an update needed?

- To keep up with changing models of library services
- To establish minimum standards for all Oregon public libraries receiving state funds
- To align Oregon’s definition of “Public Library” with those from other states

When the current definition was written in 1975, public libraries primarily functioned as book repositories and offered little in the way of early literacy services, adult programs, or community outreach. Contemporary public libraries are welcoming spaces for a wide range of audiences and purposes, including reading, learning, engaging with friends and neighbors, and conducting business. To best meet patron needs, public libraries must be supported by an infrastructure that espouses modern technology, skilled professionals, and exemplary customer service.

Currently in Oregon, there are no specific standards for what qualifies as a public library, yet today’s patrons expect much from these institutions. Standards are critical because they give library staff direction to be innovative and responsive, while establishing a baseline from which their libraries can be measured. Minimum standards serve all library stakeholders by identifying strategic planning goals, providing guidelines for transparency and budget analysis, and safeguarding responsible management of resources entrusted under state law.

Many states statutorily define public libraries with clear criteria to ensure all communities, urban or rural, receive equivalent information services. Oregonians deserve the same. With an updated definition of “Public Library,” all residents will be able to walk into any public library in Oregon and be confident that it meets state standards and provides adequate services.

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