

Comment Report

SSB 3168

A bill for an act relating to city libraries, including library directors and library moneys.

Subcommittee Members: Green-CH, Klimesh, Weiner

Date: 02/12/2024

Time: 12:30 PM

Location: Room 315

Name: Christa Braga

Comment: I am a lifelong Iowan and lifelong public library user; after growing up in Winterset, I now call DeWitt my home. Both communities have incredible libraries with a vast and inclusive number of programs. Libraries are a hub of a community, providing space to not only read but also utilize a variety of resources to help individuals learn and grow with knowledge and experiences. To saddle any city council with more oversight tasks that would ultimately undermine one of the foundations of a community is foolish. What city council wants to add more work to their already busy docket? What problem is this trying to solve? Library boards are appointed by local elected officials. HSB678/SSB3168 is, simply put, a way to politicize libraries a place where inclusion and education is paramount to the building blocks of a strong community. I strongly oppose this legislation.

Name: Laura Thomas

Comment: Myself and my board are opposed to this bill. It limits the rights of voters to choose their library board, and the board to choose their library director. It removes the people's enhanced oversight, transparency, and liability of their public libraries by removing volunteer Iowans from the process. It also places the onus on the city, who's workers are not trained in the same way as library workers, and with no additional funding or training. This bill is limiting the rights of both the library and the voters.

Name: Heidi Reinking

Comment: There is absolutely no reason for this legislation. This puts politics in a spot where politics isn't needed. "Authority over...with no public vote" speaks volumes for what is trying to be accomplished. As a member of the Board of Trustees for our local library, I oppose this legislation.

Name: Cara Stone

Comment: Im writing as a resident of Ames, IA (and lifelong Iowan having been born and raised in Boone, IA and attended college in Decorah, IA) in opposition of SSB 3168 which impacts Iowa's public libraries. Local library boards are best positioned to oversee funds, collections, and programs judiciously, ensuring libraries are able to use the resources to serve the children, families, and other members of their communities. Libraries are integral to community literacy programs, serving homeschooling families, bridging the summer gap for public school students with summer reading programs, helping citizens seek out and attain employment, and helping communities come together for book clubs and other activities. Library board oversight is essential and board members are trained, trusted, and equipped to oversee these programs and judiciously allocate library funding. Please stop SSB 3168.

Name: Bethany Seedorff

Comment: As a lifelong Iowan, I strongly oppose this bill. The library has always been a place of information and education. My personal experience started when I attended Story Hour at the Arlington Public Library as a fouryearold, which was the only formal education I had before kindergarten. I was a frequent visitor to that library throughout my youth, both for entertainment (books, movies) and educational purposes (research projects). Now my children get myriad benefits from the DeWitt Community Pubic Library attending programs, checking out books, and learning about the world. My city council has enough to worry about, and giving any municipal organization the ability to revoke services without voter approval goes against the very foundation of our democracy.

Name: Rebekah Hosford

Comment: I vehemently oppose SSB 3168. Do not take away the autonomy of the Library Board. This legislation takes away the power of the public library board to oversee the library without political interference. I thought we had made our opinion clear about how harmful the proposed ideas in this legislation would be when we spoke out against SSB 3131. SSB 3168, SSB 3166, and HSB 678 all say essentially the same thing as SSB 3131. Putting these abhorrent ideas into separate bills do not make them any more palatable. Go visit your local library. See the good and value they bring to the community. Talk to the patrons. Talk to the library workers. Then vote NO on this ridiculous piece of legislation.

Name: Jessica Hubbard

Comment: Libraries have been and continue to be a great resource within our communities. My experience in libraries throughout the state of Iowa has been positive and meaningful. Library boards and their informed decision making are what help create these very experiences. Allow library boards to continue to do their good work and keep policy making out of the hands of city councils.

Name: Kay Elsbernd

Comment: I oppose this bill. This bill limits the rights of voters to choose for their community. It removes transparency and oversight currently provided by trained library board members. There is nothing in this bill that will improve Iowa libraries or the lives of Iowans who use libraries.

Name: Leandra Sunseri

Comment: I oppose this bill. Solid practices are already in place for hiring and monitoring the work of library directors and also the expenditure of tax dollars for libraries. I can't figure out what the motivation is for bringing this bill forth. Republican leadership has been quoted as saying it's not related to the content of some books in public libraries but in response to (as a sheaf of papers is held up) concerns of cities and towns who've communicated with the Republican leadership. If so, make those concerns public. They certainly aren't reflected in comments made to this version, or the former version, of the bill. This bill does not respect the voters of our cities and towns.

Name: Lisa Petrie

Comment: I am vehemently opposed to SSB 3168, just as I was earlier versions of this legislation. Public comments demonstrate clearly that Iowa citizens and city managers are **not** asking for this bill. Do not advance this bill.

Name: Emily Todd

Comment: I oppose this bill just as I have all other versions. I am deeply disappointed there are so many. Iowan across the state have loudly spoken against legislation that removes, funding and strips the authority of library boards, and removes the public from having a voice in their community over their own local library. Please do not advance this bill.

Name: Bobbi Newman

Comment: The responsibility of hiring library directors should remain with library trustees rather than city officials for several reasons: Library trustees typically possess expertise in library science and understand their libraries' unique needs and goals, ensuring that candidates selected for the director position are well-suited to lead effectively. Maintaining this responsibility within the purview of library trustees fosters continuity and stability within the library's leadership, as trustees are often appointed for longer terms than city officials. Keeping hiring decisions within the authority of library trustees upholds the autonomy of the library and its ability to operate independently, free from potential political influence or conflicts of interest that may arise if city officials were to oversee the hiring process. Overall, entrusting library trustees with hiring library directors promotes preserving the library's mission, integrity, and commitment to serving its community. Utilizing funds for library projects and initiatives without a public referendum, as permitted by ordinance, may undermine transparency and democratic decision-making processes. Without public input or approval, there is a risk that community members may feel excluded from important decisions regarding the allocation of public funds, particularly those relating to essential services such as libraries. This approach could lead to mistrust and dissatisfaction among constituents who value transparency and accountability in using taxpayer money.

Name: Tiffany DeBow

Comment: So right now the people elect a library board & that board appoints a director to oversee the library operations. Meaning the people who are invested in the library & how it works get to decide. This law will change it so that the city council can end that practice and decide they can appoint a director or maybe the mayor can decide. Why should people who know nothing about libraries & literacy be the ones to decide who gets to appoint the director? This makes no sense. Vote NO on passing this law.

Name: Debbi Washburn

Comment: This is a total waste of taxpayer money! You should all be ashamed of taking time to do this. We have library boards who are people much more qualified to do this job!

Name: Britannia Morey

Comment: I am opposed to this bill. The language of this bill Authority over...with no public vote is not local control. Library directors have specific training and education to curate a library. This is not the job of the city council and it is not the job of the legislature to overreach into our communities and exact control. I would ask that you focus your time on the actual issues that need attention in this state such as setting education funding at an appropriate level that reflects inflation, ensuring we have clean water, and that all rights of citizens are protected. Stay out of our public libraries they are doing just fine.

Name: Kamryn Kronschnabel

Comment: This bill should not be elevated to the state level. There is already a legal way for city councils to gain extra control over libraries via referendums, and this additional legislation is a waste of everyone's time. City councils rarely want the responsibility that is proposed here, and forcing it on everyone is a disservice to Iowans.

Name: Rhonda King

Comment: I am writing to voice my disagreement with this library bill. Our area libraries are wonderful community hubs where differing needs can be addressed and implemented. Keeping local control is a primary concern.

Name: Susan Olesen

Comment: Our library serves local citizens admirably with limited funding, and given all of the services it provides, I cannot for the life of me understand why you would go after libraries. We have seniors not being taken care of in nursing homes. We have filthy water. We have insurance rates rising beyond affordability. Our public schools are underfunded and because of that, my rural school district is short 5 teachers. The Governor goes after the AEAs which make it possible for rural children to have the same services as urban children and her bill is still alive in the Senate. Local control is in peril because the current Governor and Republican majorities in the Legislature and the Governor dont trust local citizens to govern themselves. And the Republican party goes after libraries. This appears to me to be another incursion into the rights of Iowans to be free to read what they want to read and to be exposed to ideas they havent considered. And it is a special hit on poor families who use the library technology for homework, business, job seeking, and communication. Libraries are at the heart of democracy. I would hope legislative bodies would be as well, but it doesnt look that way these days in Iowa. Stop this social engineering and get back to the business of enhancing the quality of life for all Iowans.

Name: Brenda Case

Comment: Please oppose SSB 3168. We do not need to change our current system of local control through a local library board.