

January 2013 Trustee Tip of the Month 2013 Legislative Session

As public officials, it is very important that trustees communicate with legislators and local officials about issues relating to library service. This tip is designed to provide trustees with the information needed to communicate with local officials about issues that will be considered in the 2013 session of the General Assembly. With 20 million visits to public libraries in Kentucky last year, public libraries provide more service than almost any other organization in Kentucky's communities. Legislators and local officials must be educated regarding the wide scope of public library service and its impact on the community. They must also be aware of legislation that might threaten library service. You are in an ideal position to influence decisions on a state and local level that will impact your library and your county in the future. Your communication with local officials can directly impact whether your board has the ability to operate in the best interests of the library and the community.

During the last half of 2012, State Auditor Adam Edelen conducted the most comprehensive survey of special districts ever undertaken in Kentucky. His survey and the resulting report identified 1268 special districts operating across the state with combined budgets of \$2.7 billion. News reports focused on the lack of compliance with state laws by a sizeable minority of the special districts. For libraries, however, the news was very good. The 106 public library taxing districts were almost totally in compliance and the remaining non-taxing districts were in compliance as far as their situation allowed. In fact, the Auditor's first "Best Practice Case Study" commented: "... KDLA and the KPLA put a great deal of effort to provide the public with as much transparency and accountability as possible. In addition, they have gone to great lengths to ensure their members have the training necessary to be able to provide these things" (Ghost Government: A Report on Special Districts in Kentucky, p. 47).

http://apps.auditor.ky.gov/Public/Audit_Reports/Archive/2012GhostGvoernmentSpecialDistrictsreport.pdf

As a result of the survey, the State Auditor is recommending legislation for the General Assembly session that will begin in January. His recommendations include: a registry maintained by the Department for Local Government that provides easy access to financial information about special districts and shows whether special districts are in compliance with statutory filing requirements; inclusion of special districts under the county's ethics code; teeth to deal with special districts not in compliance with the law; and revision of the 1000+ statutes that govern special districts. Based on the compliance with state law demonstrated by public library districts in the State Auditor's survey, the library community has much to gain from the Auditor's initiatives. Libraries are already in compliance and will benefit as other districts are required to comply. Shining light on all special districts will enable libraries to even further demonstrate our desire for transparency and show accountability that has always been a standard of public library operations. Legislation recommended by the Auditor will make compliance easier for libraries as required filings are streamlined and centralized.

While public libraries have little to fear from these general recommendations, additional initiatives added on to these recommendations are a cause of great concern. The State Auditor has expressly

stated that changes in governance of special districts, and specifically public libraries, are not included in his recommendations and are not appropriate for this legislation. Public libraries are highlighted by the State Auditor as using best practices among special districts. Citizen boards have developed quality library services across Kentucky over the last 50 years so that public libraries have become cherished institutions. This has been accomplished economically in a fashion that exemplifies transparency and accountability. Changing the proven method of providing public library service would be a mistake that would seriously threaten libraries and impact quality of life, education, and economic development across the Commonwealth.

If you have questions or need additional information, please contact your regional librarian, the State Librarian, or any staff member at the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives. For a summary of talking points, the KPLA Advocacy Committee has put together a document that is available at:

<http://kpla.org/wp-content/uploads/HB1-Talking-Points-for-Library-Directors-and-Trustees-13-Dec-2012.pdf>. Please watch for additional information and updates from the KPLA Advocacy Committee as the legislative session proceeds and plan to join library supporters from across Kentucky on February 20 as they meet with their legislators in Frankfort and celebrate libraries in a rally in the Capitol Rotunda.