
Op-ed by Rep. Jim Runestad: Libraries provide essential community resources

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Thu, Dec 29, 2016 at 1:31 PM



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MICHIGAN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JIM RUNESTAD
STATE REPRESENTATIVE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dec. 28, 2016

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Libraries provide essential community resources

Op-ed by State Rep. Jim Runestad, R-White Lake

The 396 Michigan public libraries serve five million children, teens and adults. Today, more than ever, libraries serve a critical need in our society. Our libraries provide computer access for state business, Secretary of State's driver license and registration renewals, Michigan Works, Federal tax filing, job hunting and career building along with providing small business resources. For many Michigan residents, a public library is their only means of Internet access. In 2015 children, teens and adults made 53 million visits to the library.

Communities support their libraries and 98% of library funding is local. Voters go to the polls and choose to support their libraries by approving a dedicated library millage. Many times tax capture authorities such as DDAs or TIFAs take a portion of this millage to use on their own projects. These locally dedicated taxes — approved by voters for library funding — maybe captured without the knowledge or approval of the voting taxpayers.

When proposed special library mileages disclose the required tax capture allocation, the mileages are more easily defeated. Moreover, when the tax capture is not transparent and the voters do not understand where these funds are being diverted, the voters will be less likely to support the library in the future.

When voters approve a millage they expect that money will go to that purpose, in this case, the library. Astoundingly, one library in our state is subject to thirteen separate tax captures siphoning from their millage. More dollars are being captured from this library than the library spends on all collections material for the year; books, eBooks, videos, DVDs and audio. Another library has the equivalent of 47% of their budget captured. Libraries are faced with eliminating resources, services and programming for their public; cutting staff and reducing the hours they remain open.

Libraries want to be partners and have a seat at the table to work in collaboration with these entities investing in our communities. Once signed by our governor, legislation passed this year will ensure more transparency and respect for the voters' choice at the ballot box and give libraries a voice. This new legislation would allow libraries to opt-in for tax capture if they determine the project would be right for their patrons. For example, if the tax capture would enable the development of a new downtown parking lot creating more accessibility, the library could allow the tax capture. Giving libraries the option to opt-in or out of tax captures will require more discussion of the value of the capture with the library board and the community.

Most tax captures work harmoniously with their community partners. When the DDA in Milford was formed they worked with the library, and other special mileages to be sure they were mutually supportive. Libraries would continue to support community projects under this legislation. In addition, with the implementation of these new laws, libraries would not be able to pull out of any tax capture with a bond or long term debt that has already

been guaranteed. Tax capture entities can make essential projects for our communities come to life. Bringing libraries to the table will expand the dialogue and broaden the base of voter support for future projects.

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Thank you,

Samantha Bell

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