

MLA Advocacy - August 25, 2016



Future Library Leaders Embrace the First Amendment

The first amendment protects our rights to free speech and our library community spent a great deal of time defending those rights this year. It's important to note that the first amendment also protects our right to petition for governmental redress of grievances and this is a pretty fair definition of lobbying. So it's safe to say our ability to engage with our elected officials is safeguarded in the bill of rights.

In 2015 Senator Jim Stamas (R-Midland) insisted that libraries see an increase in state aid resulting in a \$1 million increase which we have maintained through the current fiscal year. He also took time recently to share his views with our librarians at our August MLA Leadership Academy. As the next generation of library leaders, it is important they understand that active participation in government is their responsibility. Sen. Stamas led a thoughtful and engaging conversation which helped them to understand the work our elected leaders do every day. This was an important lesson since we all know it can be a challenge to find relevance in government when you are busy day to day keeping the library running.

During the conversation, Sen. Stamas asked a thought-provoking question about the librarians' views of lobbyists and politicians. He referenced the negative media surrounding lobbyists and their influence on elected officials. He explained that legislators' reliance on groups like MLA for education is critical to good public policy. This is especially true with term limits in place. If MLA and librarians don't educate and explain the important place libraries hold in the community, it will become more and more difficult for our elected officials to understand the need to maintain or increase funding.

He also reminded the group that his office can be a resource to help them accomplish their goals whether it's securing a library grant or a much bigger agenda such as an increase to state aid.

Not only is the Senator a library supporter, he uses his library (Grace A. Dow Memorial Library in Midland) on a regular basis. In fact, he took time out from the frantic activities surrounding

one recent election day to stop into his library to appreciate a few minutes of solitude. It's nice to know that libraries continue to be a safe refuge from the information overload that life can sometimes bring.

As the advocacy portion of leadership academy wound up, participants were given an assignment that included reaching out to an elected official and inviting them to their library. We are encouraging every library leader to contact their Representatives and Senators and take the time to educate them about your library and its critical place in the community. If you would like assistance setting up a meeting or visit, contact MLA and we would be happy to assist.

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