



## MEMO

**To:** MSL Commissioners  
**From:** Jennie Stapp, State Librarian  
**Subject:** House Bill 91 Memo  
**Date:** April 1, 2023

The following information is shared with the Commission in response to the Senate 2<sup>nd</sup> reading floor debate on House Bill (HB) 91 Revise laws related to public library state aid. As a reminder, HB 91 is an agency bill that has the support of Governor Gianforte.

That debate is available online here: [Montana Legislature \(sliq.net\)](https://sliq.net).

### Is this a tax increase?

The Senate Joint Resolution 2 General Fund revenue estimate in 2013 was \$2.13B. 2013 was the year this statutory appropriation was first passed.

In 2023, the House Joint Resolution 2 GF estimate is \$3.78 B or an increase of \$1.65B.

The State can afford an increase of \$100,000 to state aid without a tax increase, especially one that is equivalent to \$.10/person.

### Children are not using libraries

In FY 22, children and teen programs in libraries were attended by 158,914 Montana youth.

Additional statistics from FY 22:

- 40% of Montanans have library cards;
- Last year Montanans visited libraries 2.5M times;
- Montanans checked out 5.1M items.

### People are using technology in libraries

In FY 22:

- Montanans used library wifi 1.4M times;
- Montanans used public access computers 290,000 times;
- Montanans ask librarians for technology assistance 52,000 times.



### Tribal college libraries are being treated differently than public libraries

The assertion that public library standards were somehow lessened to account for tribal college libraries is false. When the Montana State Library modernized public library standards in 2021, we took care to ensure that the standards that all libraries meet do not create artificial barriers for tribal college libraries.

Montana code cannot allow for the creation of tribal libraries through the same laws that create public libraries in local governments because tribes are sovereign nations, so the State of Montana does not have the authority to tell them how to form libraries.

### Libraries on the reservation are the responsibility of the federal government

Tribal college libraries serve all citizens in their communities, not just tribal members.

The only source of federal funds for public library services for tribal libraries are one-time competitive grants.

### Libraries have become too left leaning and no longer deserve state funding

When state aid was reauthorized in 2017 the vote passed the Senate 48 to 2. Since then, libraries have not changed how they serve our communities. They all want libraries to be places that are safe and welcoming for children and families and resources to support healthy, resilient communities. This is a point on which we believe all Montanans can agree.

Librarians continue to believe in the fundamental right to read and encourage parents and caregivers to actively guide the learning of their children. Librarians also believe that no one parent has the right to tell another parent what their children can and cannot read.

Montana librarians are hurt and tired of being demonized by national rhetoric and unfounded stereotypes driven by culture wars. Our librarians genuinely care about the people who use our libraries because they are our friends and neighbors.

22-1-103, Montana Code Annotated states that the State Library Commission may (1) give assistance and advice to all tax-supported or public libraries in the state and to all counties, cities, towns, or regions in the state that propose to establish libraries, as to the best means of establishing and improving those libraries.

Amid this debate in our state, what can the State Library do to assist Montana libraries and to change the dialogue from one that hurts libraries and Montanans to one that supports them?