

8/5/20 @ 9:24A

August 5, 2020

To: Curry County Board of Commissioners

Presented by: Jeremy Skinner, Director, Curry Public Library
Denise Willms, Director, Port Orford Public Library

Re: Proposed Advisory Question about Library District Consolidation

The publicly elected Boards of Directors of the Agness Public Library, the Chetco Community Library, the Curry Public Library, the Langlois Public Library, and the Port Orford Public Library have discussed this joint statement requesting that the commissioners vote no on the proposal to refer an advisory question about library district consolidation to the November ballot.

It is our conclusion that the proposed question misleads voters into thinking the county can legally make governance decisions for our five independently governed districts. This is not good for public confidence in county government or special districts. Furthermore, the proposed question does not meet the statutory requirements (ORS 251.067, 251.285, 251.345, and OAR 165-022-0040) of being **impartial, simple, and understandable**.

To the issue of **impartiality**, the advisory question as written is based on inaccurate information about libraries. We find no evidence to support the statement:

With the advances in technology, many residents no longer need a physical library. Rather, many traditional library services are now available electronically from the convenience of one's home.

On the contrary, the data the libraries have collected show that:

- The libraries in Curry County are some of the most heavily used public facilities in the county.
- Overall per capita use has increased, not decreased over the past five years.
- Connectivity for virtual communications and digital resources is not available or affordable for everyone in Curry County, and the libraries are the only free and accessible source for the public to access these critical resources.

Additionally, the language of the advisory measure erroneously insinuates to voters that some libraries are failing to meet their goals, and that consolidation will remedy this problem while potentially saving money. While the services provided by each library varies, this is by design to meet local needs (i.e. there is not a youth population of pre-K children in Agness, and as a result they do not host pre-K programs). In cases where there have been local needs that exceeded a district's allocated budgets, the local communities in our districts have consistently stepped up to address the shortfall. This is one of the great strengths of local special district governance--our constituents care deeply about our services because they are local and meaningful. In rare cases where needs have not been met locally, the five libraries have voluntarily worked together to

seek grants and other solutions to ensure each library meets its community needs. We are unanimous in our pride in local control, local autonomy, collaboration, and our high level of achievement as a group of library districts.

In terms of the benchmark of **simplicity**, this question fails by proposing district consolidation without providing a definition of consolidation for the voters. District consolidation is in fact, a complex legal process outlined by state law. The question is further confused by the fact that consolidation would not change the total amount of revenue collected from tax-payers. This question does not explicitly state that tax payers would save money, but it is insinuated and directly stated in Commissioner Paasch's press releases and related agenda documents. For the sake of transparency to the voters, an advisory question should note that the permanent tax rate for consolidated districts must, by law, result in the same tax revenue as the individual districts would have collected. That would make the new tax rate an estimated 0.5023/1,000 across the board, redistributing the tax burden overwhelmingly (approximately \$150,000 per year by this year's tax assessment) to the community of Brookings-Harbor and the rest of the Chetco Library district.

In reference to the statutory requirement that advisory questions be **understandable**, it must be noted that there is a glaring logical fallacy in the way this question is posed. If, as the question is stated, libraries and their facilities are irrelevant and no longer used, why would the county not ask the voters if they are in favor of eliminating libraries? Instead, this question asks voters if they want to re-organize them. This does not meet the benchmark of being understandable.

The language of this advisory question also fails in its **impartiality** and **understandability** by misleading voters and indicating that the vote will guide the libraries in their consolidation discussions. No such discussions have been initiated. Any such future discussions would be initiated by the library governance boards, and the libraries themselves will gather public input on the issue.

In summary, this advisory question undermines public trust, inappropriately interferes with special district governance, and fails to meet the statutory benchmarks for an advisory question. We ask that in addition to voting no on this flawed advisory question, the Curry County Commissioners conclude this process of investigating the viability of libraries as part of the effort to free up money for County operations. The people in our Districts elected us to act on their behalf in regards to their libraries.

The evidence clearly shows we are needed by our communities, we are used by our communities, we are adeptly managed, and we are impacting the lives of our citizens and youth in profoundly positive ways. It is time for us to return to this work and stop wasting taxpayers' time.