

Iowa Library Association Statement on HF 718 in Regard to Library Levies

The Iowa Library Association urges Iowa communities and local government officials to discuss the levy bill-related changes that will diminish and harm library services throughout the state.

In order to create necessary pressure to sustainably fund library services, ILA implores library supporters to:

- email their City Council members
- call their Library Board of Trustee members
- participate in library advocacy initiatives

In Iowa, special levies are taxes that have been petitioned for and then passed by local citizens through an election. A special levy specifically ties the funds to a particular purpose, like supporting local libraries. Special levies represent the will of the people. Of all the special levies approved by Iowa citizens, library levies have been the second most heavily utilized.

In the fiscal year ending in 2023, 97 Iowa communities benefited from special library levies. Those levies guaranteed funds for libraries that could not legally be allocated to any other purpose. Some of these libraries depend heavily on library levies for their operational budgets. Iowa libraries are connected through collaborative services, like sharing databases and materials. When one library loses funding, it negatively impacts every library in the state.

This year, the state legislature passed a property tax reform package to reduce property tax bills across the state. One of the provisions of the bill, known as HF 718, combines 15 of the state's individual levies into a single general levy. With the passage of HF 718, funds will be collected as part of the general levy but can no longer be guaranteed for a special purpose — like the library.

This bill stripped Iowans of their right to grow library services through local elections. In addition, Iowa communities were stripped of the budget they were legally pledged and no longer have guaranteed funding. Other communities no longer have the ability to locally petition for a library directed levy.

Library funding is an access and freedom issue that impacts all. Fewer resources mean fewer books and ebooks, less programming, and diminished return on Iowans' investment in libraries. The voices of the people must be heard. Iowans must speak loudly to ensure library services do not suffer as they compete for limited funds.