



Law Librarians Association of Wisconsin

May 24th, 2018

To Mr. Rick Champagne, Chief and General Counsel of the Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau:

The Law Librarians Association of Wisconsin (LLAW) writes to express our concern that essential public access to legal and legislative information in Wisconsin is being threatened because of drastic and unwarranted cuts to the Legislative Reference Bureau Theobald Legislative Library. LLAW is an organization of legal information professionals who work with and depend on legislative materials maintained and archived by the LRB Library on a regular basis. Our members understand the foundational importance of the LRB library and the role it plays in Wisconsin government.

The Legislative Reference Bureau (LRB) recently eliminated half of its library staff, imperiling its statutory duties, according to Wis. Stat. 13.92(1), of collecting information that will aid the legislature and “citizens generally”. The continued devaluation of the LRB Library is emblematic of the decline in services offered by the LRB in recent years as LRB administration has unwisely shifted their focus away from providing easily accessible information and historical data towards a false dependence on Google and other imperfect internet search engines. Drastic cuts of librarian positions have created a detrimental loss of services to Wisconsin legislators and citizens that general internet searches cannot replace.

The LRB was founded in 1901, the first of its kind in the nation. Since its founding, the LRB Library has served as a model for legislative libraries across the nation, inspiring others to provide access to legislative reports and easy-to-understand explanations of bills, acts and other legislative material for the public. These materials, extending back to when Wisconsin was a part of the Northwest Territory, are the envy of most states and are reviewed and organized by librarians, maintaining professional standards to ensure that authentic information is delivered to the public. The LRB Library is a long-standing and well-respected institution that has not outlived its usefulness. Rather, the service it provides is more vital than ever.

It is a common and mistaken belief that libraries and librarians are no longer as important in a digital world. Today, there is more information available than ever before. However, that does not mean that it is always easy to find or factually accurate. The LRB Library provides not only a singular home for the archives of the Wisconsin Legislature, but also an important service in ensuring that its publications are organized, cataloged, properly maintained, and made available to legislators, researchers and citizens of the state. These efforts save legislators and citizens countless hours of difficult and potentially fruitless internet searching.

With the continued decrease in library staff, the statutory requirement that the LRB serve as a state document depository, per Wis. Stat. 35.82, is also threatened because the LRB Library fulfills this requirement. The library plays a critical role in preserving and maintaining legislative documents, both in print and online. With the staff now consisting of only two librarians, these duties will be increasingly difficult to maintain in conjunction with the continuing responsibilities of ensuring accessibility to these materials. Since many materials are now only available online and usually only



via the LRB, this puts more pressure on the LRB Library to maintain the digital archive as well. With fewer staff and less support, the depository status of the LRB and availability of these comprehensive legislative materials is threatened, compromising the LRB's ability to fulfill the statutory duties which the Theobald Legislative Library and its staff currently fills.

The spirit and letter of Wisconsin law requires, and the LRB Library provides, a necessary service to legislators and the public. By creating a digital archive, compiling important information about the Wisconsin government, and offering research help, the LRB Library has proven that it is an important pillar of Wisconsin government. To weaken or remove that pillar would be to remove the most effective way that the people of Wisconsin can learn about their state government in general and their legislator's actions in particular. Instead of relying on the false belief that anything can be found on “the internet”, LLAW asks that the administrators of the LRB, the executive branch, and Wisconsin legislators restore library personnel to the LRB Library and support its continuing mission to provide accessible, authenticated, and informative resources to all the people of Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

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<http://chapters.aallnet.org/llaw/index.html>

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