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Boulder City Library District

Duncan R. McCoy, Director, Boulder City Library District

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Human Resources and Facilities on AB-407

April 28, 2003

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen of the Senate Committee on Human Resources and Facilities, my name is Duncan R. McCoy. I am Director of the Boulder City Library District, having held that position for the past 14 years. I have served continuously as a public library director since 1978.

I am speaking today in support of AB-407.

While not providing a "mandate" for creating joint-use school/public libraries, the bill does provide an encouragement for their development in locations and situations where such development makes sense.

In geographical areas which are underserved by public libraries, joint-use facilities have been shown to be a viable option when construction of new public library facilities is not feasible. The Washoe County experience with their "Partnership Libraries" has shown that most, if not all, problem issues with joint-use can be dealt with, given an appropriate level of commitment on the part of the agencies involved.

I have toured several of Washoe County's partnership libraries over the years and wish to note for the record that the ones I've toured are positively the strongest school libraries I've seen in my years as a librarian. These libraries are, at the same time, very, very nice neighborhood libraries for the public to use. Clearly, the partnership libraries have benefited from the cooperative arrangement between the Washoe County School District and the Washoe County Library System.

That said, I would be less than candid if I did not mention that the missions of school and public libraries are very different and that the general level of funding of school libraries is probably not, in most school libraries, adequate for their main mission of curricular support, much less an additional mission of service to the general public. In keeping with their main mission of curricular support, school libraries tend to collect materials which directly relate to reading levels of their students and classroom teaching units. The school library will not usually collect best-sellers, general adult fiction, materials of special appeal to senior citizens (like large-print books, audio books, retirement investment information, medical and dietary information, etc.) or any of the host of other informational topics which must be collected by a public library in order to provide adequate service. As an example of comparative materials acquisition budgets between school and public libraries, the materials budget of the Boulder City High School Library (one of the better school libraries in our area) is \$3,255. The Librarian, Mrs. Boyce, does an admirable job of supplementing her budget through active community fundraising, but purchase of one new set of Encyclopedia Americana can wipe out half her year's allocation of book money. The Boulder City Library District, on the other hand, in the same community of about 15,000, will expend approximately \$130,000 on books,

periodicals, audio-visual materials and digital information resources this year. Even an outstanding school library, such as Boulder City High School enjoys, does not have the financial horsepower to provide materials for the general public.

If joint-use library facilities are to be seriously considered, the issue of how to handle greatly expanded materials purchasing must be seriously considered. It really costs a lot more to provide library materials for the general public than is currently being provided by the school districts for curriculum-related collection development in the school libraries. For the above reasons, I think the encouragement of joint-use libraries would be far more effective if a financial support component of AB-407 were to be added to help the joint-use library bridge the gap between low-level school district materials funding and that required for adequate public coverage. Secondly, I feel that an appropriation should be made to encourage the Washoe County Public Library System and the Washoe County School District to publish a manual, based on their collective experience with joint-use libraries, for the edification of school districts and public libraries which might wish to contemplate development of such facilities. I realize, of course, that meaningful financial support from the State is probably not feasible, at this time.

There are a variety of issues which must be addressed if a joint-use library facility is to succeed: materials funding has been mentioned above and is accompanied by personnel funding, governance, administration, and security issues, to mention a few. The Washoe County experience has shown us that, given an appropriate level of commitment among the agencies involved, these can be dealt with.

Joint-use library facilities can be an option in areas which are not served or are underserved by local public library jurisdictions. The Washoe County Partnership Library program has shown that such cooperation is both possible and beneficial to the patrons of both the school library and public library system. I believe this option is deserving of exploration in situations in which new public library construction is desired and contemplated. While this may not be the ideal solution in every case, it may be in some cases. Washoe County has provided the people of Nevada with an outstanding model of cooperative service, which should be closely studied, a model which shows that the problems can be addressed and effective service can result.

I applaud Dr. Hardy and the sponsors of AB-407 for your interest and initiative and urge passage of the bill, with a funding component for collection development and study manual, if possible. I also wish to congratulate the Washoe County Library System and the Washoe County School District for showing all of us how joint-use libraries can be made to work.

Thank you,



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Boulder City Library District
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