



The Voice of the Library Community

New York Library Association

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S3594 (Harckham) / A5266 (Levenberg)

An act to amend the education law, in relation to setting the number of petitioners necessary to call for a vote on increasing the amount of funding of the annual contribution for the operating budget of a registered public or free association library

The New York Library Association (NYLA) supports the above referenced legislation.

If enacted, this bill would align the petition signature requirement for libraries using a municipal ballot approach to request voter-directed operating aid with the 25-signature requirement in place for libraries using a school district ballot approach for the same purpose.

Currently, any library that relies on a municipal ballot vote to request an increase in voter-directed operating aid must secure valid petition signatures in a number equal to “at least ten per centum of the total number of votes cast in such municipality for governor at the last gubernatorial election.” Libraries able to utilize a school district ballot approach to establish or increase local voter-directed operating aid, by contrast, need only 25 valid petition signatures to place the question on the ballot alongside their communities’ next school budgets.

In practical terms, this disparity makes the process of requesting additional funds considerably more challenging for those who, by necessity, rely on the municipal ballot approach. These are often smaller, rural libraries and those where the concentration of libraries chartered by the New York State Board of Regents require units smaller than the school districts they exist within. The challenge of obtaining hundreds, sometimes thousands of signatures, frequently in areas with low-population density and small pools of volunteers, can be a substantial barrier to such libraries holding routine votes. Without routine votes, they are unable to keep up with basic cost-of-living increases, offer competitive salaries, and continue to offer their communities the level of service they deserve.

Take, for example, Brewster Public Library in the Mid-Hudson Library System, a system where over 50% of the libraries rely on the municipal ballot approach. Due to challenges with securing the requisite number of petition signatures, the library experienced a ten-year gap between its original ballot vote in 2011 and its second vote in 2021, at which time the petitioning threshold was temporarily lowered to 25 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The decade-long gap meant



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that, by the time a request for increased funding got on the ballot, it was for a 31% increase in the level of local taxation for library services. Though the measure passed, a lower petition requirement would have allowed for a more gradual, predictable increase in the tax burden placed on local residents and greater stability for its library.

Parity in the number of signatures required to place local library funding in the hands of voters is an issue of equity for our state. A library's potential access to community funding should be based on local priorities and willingness to invest in a shared resource, not how well its service area conforms to the boundaries of a school district. Whether 25, 500, or 1,000 of a community's residents sign a petition, the ultimate decision on funding and taxation still requires the approval of its voters.

For these reasons, the New York Library Association urges Governor Hochul to sign S3594/A5266, to set the number of petitioners necessary to call for a vote on increasing the amount of funding of the annual contribution for the operating budget of a registered public or free association library.

For additional information, please contact Max Prime at the New York Library Association at 518.432.6952.