



# OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE

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JESSE WHITE • Secretary of State

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Springfield, IL 62701

Ms. Deirdre Brennan  
Executive Director  
Reaching Across Illinois Library System  
125 Tower Drive  
Burr Ridge, IL 60527

October 2, 2019

Dear Dee:

RE: *Your question, "Why are people unserved?"*

Simply put, the laws which enable the establishment of public libraries in Illinois do no mandate it. The only appearance of a mandate might be considered within the Illinois Library System Act at 75 ILCS 10/3 a) where it indicates administration of this Act would be designed to "Provide library service for every citizen in the state by extending library facilities to areas not now served." That provision has not changed since its inception in 1965.

The Illinois Local Library Act indicates that public libraries "may" be established (75 ILCS 5/1-2). The Public Library District Act of 1991 indicates that library districts and libraries "may" be established (75 ILCS 16/1-10). The Village Library Act (75 ILCS 40/) enables the trustees of any village the authority to establish a public library. Similarly, the Public Library District Act indicates how the district "may" annex or extend services through expansion of their taxable territory.

At one point in Illinois library history, it was thought that county-wide/multiple township service areas could better address the issue of the expansive unserved/untaxed areas of the state. There were projects to extend public library services into unserved areas established for the Illinois Valley District Library (Peru), the Prairie Trails Library District (Rochelle), the Kaskaskia Regional Library Project (Mascoutah), the Fox River Regional Library (Dundee, Elgin, Roselle), and the Warren-Henderson County Project. While each of those areas has library service today, only the Warren-Henderson County program was successful with voter approval as it was originally intended in the pilot program.

By the 1960's, there were a reported 521 Illinois public libraries and only three of those served an area as large as one county. In 1963, there were a reported 2.1 million residents of the state that were untaxed; that represented approximately 21% of the state's population. Today, we are estimating

950,000-975,000 of the estimated 12.7 million Illinois residents are untaxed for public library services. That represents about 8.8% of the state's population.

During the 1980's and beyond, grants to libraries and the library systems (e.g., Project PLUS) were awarded from this office to increase library service areas throughout the state. Those efforts, along with the collective work of individual libraries, certainly contributed to the reduction in the percentage of Illinois residents that remain untaxed for public library services.

Illinois Library Systems were developed, at least in part, as a result of the study, *A Plan for Public Library Development in Illinois*. Within the context of that report, library systems could have been interpreted as public libraries that served more than one municipality. It appears that library systems, which had a primary public library service perspective, were being developed in other states during the 1950s -1960s and Illinois was following suit. With the statutory language, which is mentioned in paragraph one, it was thought that the 2.1 million residents without service would be served and that Illinois would achieve one hundred percent public library service.

Ultimately, library systems did not develop within that limited vision. Language was later added to the Library System Act and procedures were established within Administrative Rules that incorporated the multi-type service vision with a focus upon encouraging cooperation and the sharing of resources amongst all types of libraries in the state. Due to the original intent to have the library systems provide some form of library service to the unserved in the state, they retain a prominent role in administration of the non-resident library card program that may be implemented by public libraries. Obviously, library systems developed far beyond a service model that was limited to just public library services or services specifically designed to address untaxed residents.

While often not thought of in this manner, the current Public Library Non-Resident Services program that is established in Administrative Rule is designed to allow public library access/services to all untaxed residents of the state at the same equitable cost as those taxed for this service. In that manner, all residents of the state "may" be served; yet they will remain untaxed until they determine to purchase the services from a public library. The latest Illinois Public Library Annual Reports filed with our office indicate that approximately 69,000 of the estimated 950,000 – 975,000 residents that are untaxed do choose to make the purchase of a public library card.

As we have discussed before, to achieve increased taxation for and/or participation in public library services in our state, multiple approaches may be necessary to attain the ultimate goal of "universal" service. Further, ultimately residents of the state who do not reside within public library service areas will have to agree to taxation for such.

Sincerely,



Greg McCormick  
Director