

REPLACE DON'T ERASE

*April 18, 2012
Christine Berro
Director, Portage District Library:*

Today we're calling for constitutional amendment to guarantee full replacement of the personal property tax so funding can continue to go to local communities to support local services.

This Legislature can only vote to eliminate the personal property tax. They can't bind a future Legislature to a future appropriation. Therefore a statutory replacement isn't a true replacement.

There are also many statutory funding requirements that the Legislature is not fully funding at the statutory level today. State Aid to Public Libraries (PA 89) is one example. It requires that libraries be funded at \$1.50 per capita, which is approximately \$15 million. But we've seen that funding cut over 75% - we're now funded at \$5 million.

A second example is the Renaissance Zone Act, 1996. This was an economic development tool that was supposed to create jobs. It didn't work. But as the State phases out the tax credits for business, they eliminated \$3 million in funding for public libraries.

This is why we're calling for a constitutional amendment. If the funding is cut and not replaced, the impact on library users will be significant.

As the state continues to cut their services and move online, state government is directing more and more citizens to use their local library to access state services.

Services such as renewing your driver's license, filing for unemployment, filing for disability and applying for jobs online are all state services or requirements that citizens now access at their public library.

Library usage is up all over the state. Visits to libraries increased from 52 to 57 million in the past two years.

The State can't continue to cut move state services online, expect us to serve as access points for state services, and gut our funding.

If the personal property tax is eliminated and funding is cut, library branches will close or reduce hours significantly and cut programming such as job hunting services and more.

Finally, we understand that the personal property tax is difficult to calculate and needs reform. If the Governor and the business community are convinced that this is good for business and will create jobs, then we call upon them to join us in support of a constitutional amendment.

####