

AMENDING AN ACT TO ESTABLISH AND PROVIDE FOR THE  
MAINTENANCE OF A FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY AND READING  
ROOM IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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MARCH 3, 1926.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the  
state of the Union and ordered to be printed

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Mr. ZIHLMAN, from the Committee on the District of Columbia,  
submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany S. 2673]

The Committee on the District of Columbia, to which was referred the bill (S. 2673) to amend the act approved June 3, 1896, entitled "An act to establish and provide for the maintenance of a free public library and reading room in the District of Columbia," having considered the same, report favorably thereon with the recommendation that the bill do pass.

There is appended hereto and made a part of this report the report of Mr. Capper presenting the bill to the Senate, which gives a résumé of the provisions of the various sections of the bill, a letter from the Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia, a letter from the librarian of the Public Library, a letter from Mr. Herbert Putnam, Librarian of the Library of Congress, and a resolution adopted by the District of Columbia Library Association.

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[Senate Report No. 158, Sixty-ninth Congress, first session]

The Committee on the District of Columbia, to whom was referred the bill (S. 2673) to amend the act approved June 3, 1896, entitled "An act to establish and provide for the maintenance of a free public library and reading room in the District of Columbia," having considered the same, report favorably thereon with the recommendation that the bill do pass.

The bill, which amends the present law relating to the public library in the District of Columbia, is intended to clarify the statute. It is designed principally to make clear and specific the powers of the Commissioners of the District and the library trustees for the operation and extension of the library, so that its charter may conform to present-day facts and conditions. The object, largely, is to make explicit such powers as are now granted by implication.

Specifically, the objects of each section of the bill are as follows:

Section 1: To provide legislatively for branch libraries, which the original act of June 3, 1896, did not contemplate. It is contemplated that such libraries shall be sufficiently numerous and so distributed as to make library service accessible to all inhabitants of the District of Columbia.

Section 2: To empower the library board to rent suitable quarters for branches and distributing stations, and to make explicit the power to establish branches of the Public Library in school buildings, now exercised under agreement with the Board of Education.

Section 3: To make explicit the power of the library board, now exercised, to consider as "temporary residents" for the purpose of borrowing books from the library, residents of Maryland and Virginia—most of them Government employees—who have regular business or employment in the District.

This section also empowers the board to lend books to other nonresidents on payment of fees, and to expend such fees for the support of the library.

Section 4: To continue in effect present provisions relating to appointment and term of office of the board of library trustees.

Section 5: To make unmistakable the power of the library board to collect fines for the retention of books beyond the period fixed by library regulations, and to expend for library purposes the fines and penalties so collected. Such power is now exercised, but has been questioned from time to time, though sustained by a decision of the Comptroller of the Treasury.

Section 6: To explicitly authorize the District Commissioners to include in their estimates the sums they deem necessary for the proper maintenance of the library and its branches, for the purchase of building sites, and the erection or enlargement of library buildings.

The bill itself carries no appropriation, and the Director of the Bureau of the Budget has advised that the proposed legislation will not be in conflict with the President's financial program.

From information submitted to the committee, it appears that, as compared with 35 other cities above 200,000 population, Washington is seventeenth in population, twenty-third in library expenditures, and twenty-seventh in per capita expenditures.

Average, 63 cents per capita: Washington, 46½ cents per capita; Cleveland, \$1.34; Boston, \$1.09; Portland, \$0.98; Providence, \$0.98; St. Paul, \$0.92; Indianapolis, \$0.90; Minneapolis, \$0.90, and Seattle, \$0.84.

In the matter of library branches, Washington ranks thirty-fifth, or next to the bottom.

Average, 18: Washington, 3; Cincinnati, 26; Minneapolis, 19; Indianapolis, 19; Portland, 18; Kansas City, 14; Louisville, 14; Rochester, 10; Toledo, 12; Denver, 11, and Oakland, 13; Grand Rapids, 150,000 population, 20 branches—19 in school buildings.

And that in the matter of circulation of books, Washington ranks twenty-eighth in total circulation and thirty-first in per capita circulation.

One particularly desirable anticipated effect of the passage of the proposed legislation will be the further extension of library facilities in the public schools of the District of Columbia. There has been no opposition to the bill, but, on the contrary, it has the approval of the Board of Commissioners of the District, as well as practically all of the many local civic organizations.

Appended hereto and made a part of this report is letter of January 20, 1926, from the Commissioners of the District of Columbia approving the bill, as follows:

COMMISSIONERS OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,  
Washington, January 20, 1926.

HON. ARTHUR CAPPER,  
Chairman Committee on the District of Columbia,  
United States Senate, Washington, D. C.

SIR: The Commissioners of the District of Columbia have the honor to submit herewith draft of a bill entitled "A bill to amend the act approved June 3, 1896, entitled 'An act to establish and provide for the maintenance of a free public library and reading room in the District of Columbia,' " and to request its introduction and enactment.

This bill was prepared under the direction of the board of trustees of the Public Library of the District of Columbia, which states that the object of the legislation is as follows:

Section 1 is to provide legislatively for branch libraries which the original act did not contemplate, and provides that such libraries shall be sufficiently numerous and so distributed as to furnish books and information service to all inhabitants of the District.

Section 2 is to make explicit in the act the power now exercised under an interpretation of the present act by which the library and school boards have agreed to establish branches of the Public Library in school buildings; also to empower the library board to rent suitable quarters for branches and distributing stations.

Section 3 is to make explicit the power of the library board now exercised to consider as "temporary residents" for the purpose of borrowing books from the library residents of Maryland and Virginia—mostly Government employees—who have regular business or employment in the District; also to empower the board to lend books to other nonresidents on payment of fees and to expend such fees for the support of the library.

Section 4 is the same as the existing provision in the matter of the appointment and term of office of the board of library trustees.

Section 5 is to make unmistakable in the law the power of the library board to collect fines for the retention of books beyond the period fixed by library regulations and to expend for the support of the library the fines and penalties now so expended. Although authority to do so has been sustained by a decision of the Comptroller of the Treasury dated June 24, 1912, yet from time to time this authority is still questioned. The enactment of the amendment would doubly confirm the power now exercised.

Section 6 is to make explicit the authority of the District Commissioners to include in their estimates the sums as they deem necessary for the proper maintenance of the library and its branches, for the purchase of building sites, and the erection or enlargement of library buildings.

This bill was forwarded to the Director of the Budget for consideration, and he states that the proposed legislation would not be in conflict with the financial program of the President.

Very respectfully,

J. F. BELL,

*Acting President of the Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia.*

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,  
Washington, February 9, 1926.

HON. ARTHUR CAPPER,  
*Chairman Committee on the District of Columbia,  
United States Senate, Washington, D. C.*

DEAR SENATOR CAPPER: Referring to S. 2673, a bill to amend the act approved June 3, 1896, entitled "An act to establish and provide for the maintenance of a free public library and reading room in the District of Columbia," you have asked me to give you in writing the reasons for these amendments to the Public Library's organic act, as I did orally a few days ago when President Theodore W. Noyes of the board of library trustees and I appeared before your committee and you voted favorably to report the bill. In addition to the reasons given in brief in the letter of the District Commissioners dated January 20, I offer the following:

The present organic act under which the Public Library operates, that is, this law as it now stands on the statute book, is fundamentally sound. Indeed, in declaring the Public Library to be "a supplement of the public educational system of the said District" the act took advanced ground when it was passed in 1896. Nevertheless, the law needs to be so amended that it will better correspond to present facts and conditions, that it will make the library's powers and functions more unmistakable as well as broader, to the end that the library may have a more modern charter of library progress.

From the draft of the bill as now before your committee there has been omitted a section in the organic law (enacted in 1896), repealed by implication by the laws which housed the library in Carnegie buildings, providing "That in any municipal building to be hereafter erected in said District suitable provision shall be made for said library and reading room sufficient to accommodate not less than 100,000 volumes."

This obsolete section contemplated only a single library and reading room, housed in the District Building, and without any branch libraries or other agencies.

Although we have been able to build on this fundamentally sound library law a library which now comprises nearly 300,000 volumes, housed in a fine but very much overcrowded central library building and three separate branch library buildings, and to carry on large extension activities through public and parochial schools and other agencies, it has long been felt by the library trustees and librarian that some of the powers which by implication are exercised by the District Commissioners and the library board should be made more explicit in the law, so that there will be no ground for questioning them; also that the time has come for a broader conception of the library in the law and a larger grant of power for realizing that conception.

The first amendment is the language in section 1 reading as follows:

"Said library shall consist of a central library and such number of branch libraries so located and so supported as to furnish books and other printed matter and information service convenient to the homes and offices of all residents of the said District."

This amendment sets up a standard and lays down a program. If enacted by Congress, it paves the way for enlargement of the number of library units through the establishment and maintenance as rapidly as Congress provides the funds of necessary branch libraries to the point where the entire population of the District may have convenient access to the library. At the present time the Public Library scarcely exists for a large part of the population of the District. A large number of residents, adults and children, are practically denied access to the library from having no branch library near their homes and from being compelled to take long and expensive street-car journeys to the central library or one of the few branches, only to find that the central library, or branch, to which they go is congested with throngs of readers and that the service is therefore slow. This new language is also designed explicitly to set up in the substantive law the higher standard of library service which is already maintained, so far as our limitations permit, in that it provides that the library shall furnish not only books and other printed matter but also "information service." It should be recalled that the population of Washington is above the average in education, reading abilities, and reading tastes. Such portions of the population as have any effective access to public-library facilities make large use of those facilities and make large and complex demands on the present inadequate reference and information service of the library.

The second section of the bill, entirely new, is designed to accomplish two important objects. It provides that the library board and school board may enter into agreements for the establishment and maintenance of branch libraries in suitable rooms in such school buildings as will supplement the central library and branch libraries in separate buildings. This is for the purpose of providing branch libraries in certain schools, white and colored, mostly suburban. Under such a plan it would be possible in the erection of new school buildings or the enlargement of old buildings, especially in the suburbs, to provide an extra room, preferably with an outside entrance, for housing a branch of the Public Library, conveniently and economically. It is designed that such branch libraries would be used by school children, especially during the daytime, and by the adults of the neighborhood, especially in the evening. In cases where the population of the neighborhood later becomes sufficiently dense to justify it, then such branch libraries in school buildings could be replaced by separate branch libraries serving a wider territory.

Section 2 also contains a provision authorizing the library trustees to rent buildings or parts of buildings for branch libraries or stations, provided, of course, appropriations are made for this specific purpose. In some suburban sections it will be found that the school building is overcrowded and that there is no room for housing the branch library, but the population is not sufficient to justify the erection of a separate building. To tide over till other arrangements could be made, rented quarters, for example, an unoccupied corner store space, could be made to do service.

The plan of having branch libraries in school buildings is in successful operation elsewhere, notably in St. Louis, Kansas City, Mo., and Grand Rapids. The plan of using store buildings for branch libraries is also in successful use in other cities, notably in Rochester and Cleveland.

The relations between the library and school boards are very cordial and the superintendent of school is a member of the library board. The two boards in 1922 entered into an agreement looking toward the establishment of branch libraries in school buildings. The newer buildings are being planned with this end in view. One schoolhouse has a fine room all fitted up waiting to be occu-



pied for branch library purposes. However, appropriations for such branch libraries in schools, though estimates have been carried in the Budgets of 1925 and 1926, have not thus far been granted, perhaps because there is as yet no explicit law providing therefor.

The other new language is perhaps sufficiently explained by the commissioners' letter. This legislation is urgently requested by the board of library trustees. Resolutions indorsing such legislation were adopted before the convening of Congress, by 12 citizens' associations, by the Federation of Citizens' Associations and the Citizens' Advisory Council; also by the following other civic bodies: District of Columbia Federation of Women's Clubs; Women's City Club; Twentieth Century Club; American Association of University Women, Washington Branch; Voteless League of Women Voters; Washington Central Labor Union; District of Columbia Public School Association, and the District of Columbia Library Association. I submit the resolution adopted by the last-named organization composed of the librarians of Washington.

I also wish to offer a copy of a letter from Dr. Herbert Putnam, Librarian of Congress. Though this letter was written by Doctor Putnam with the subject of appropriations especially in mind, it is pertinent to the proposal of the expansion of the Public Library.

The library trustees and I believe that the enactment of the proposed amended library law, setting up as it does an enlarged conception of the library, will prove very helpful in developing a program of library expansion needed to make the Public Library worthy of the National Capital and adequate to serve its highly and intelligent population. Of course the proposed law carries no appropriation and leaves, as at present, completely in the control of Congress, the making of appropriations for the establishment of new units of the library system and for their maintenance.

Very respectfully,

GEORGE F. BOWERMAN, *Librarian.*

PUBLIC LIBRARY,  
Washington, D. C., November 25, 1925.

Whereas the population of Washington equals, if it does not excel, that of any other city in intelligence and reading appetite;

Whereas the Library of Congress and the other governmental libraries are not designed to meet the needs of Washingtonians for popular reference and home circulation services, much less for specialized library service for children;

Whereas the support of the District of Columbia for its Public Library is less than one-half per capita the minimum of \$1 set up by the American Library Association as the requisite for municipal libraries, and the District stands next to the bottom among the larger American cities in branch libraries: Be it

*Resolved*, That the District of Columbia Library Association urges: (1) That Congress support our Public Library in accordance with the best American standards, and (2) that Congress enact the amendments to the Public Library's organic act as recommended by the library trustees, such amendments being designed to develop the Public Library so that it will consist of a central library and such number of branch libraries so distributed and so supported as to furnish books and other printed matter and information service convenient to the homes and offices of all residents of the District of Columbia.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS,  
Washington, December 11, 1925.

MY DEAR DOCTOR BOWERMAN: I have been looking over your latest report, and in connection with the needs that it states have been reviewing your report of 1924. I am confirmed in my previous belief that within the means at your disposal your library is doing, with enthusiasm and the very best directing intelligence, as creditable work as is being done by any municipal library in the United States; but I am impressed anew with the inadequacy of your resources. For over 20 years I have watched your efforts to enlarge these, and I notice that invariably they are hampered by an impression in the appropriation committees that with the Library of Congress available much less in the way of facilities is required from the library of the District than is expected of the ordinary municipal library elsewhere.

This is, of course, most unfortunate and is based on a misconception. Except as regards the Members of Congress themselves and their families (for whom the Library of Congress is "all kinds of a library"), the Library of Congress is for residents of the District purely a reference library. The only loans of books which it makes outside of the official use being to a few persons engaged in very special research requiring books not ordinarily to be found in a municipal library. This leaves to the library of the District, besides a considerable amount of ordinary reference use which its location conveniences, the entire outside service to (1) the general reader, (2) the schools and the ordinary student; and with a population of the character of that of Washington the needs of these groups are such as require and justify facilities equal to those of any municipal library in a city of a half million people.

They can be met (1) only by a more ample collection in your central building, with a staff more highly equipped from a professional standpoint; (2) by additional branch libraries and delivery stations; and (3) by branch collections in the public schools. In other words, an organization as complete as that which has become standard in other cities.

And the existence of the Library of Congress, with the facilities that it accords, no more relieves the necessity for such an organization than the existence of three great reference libraries in Chicago relieves the public library there.

I wish, indeed, that this distinction could become clear to the Appropriations Committees, and that you will succeed in convincing them that the services of the two libraries, though slightly overlapping in one respect, are in general quite distinct. In point of fact, what the general public of Washington gets from the Library of Congress, so far from being a substitute for the service of a public library, stimulates interests to which only a public lending library can respond.

Very sincerely yours,

HERBERT PUTNAM, *Librarian.*

DR. GEORGE F. BOWERMAN,

*Librarian, the Public Library of the District of Columbia,  
Washington, D. C.*

