

## Issue Brief:

# Public Library Trustees

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Library districts and many municipal libraries are governed by a five- or seven-member policy-making Board of Trustees. Under state laws originally enacted in the early 1940s, library district trustees are appointed by the county's legislative authority; city library trustees are appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the council. They are limited to two consecutive terms and may be removed only for cause after a public hearing. Public library trustees are community volunteers—they receive no compensation for their service.

While bills requiring public library trustee election have been periodically introduced, the Washington Library Association and most library trustees feel that the current system of public library trustee appointments works as well today as when it was enacted. Appointed public library trustees continue to conscientiously carry out the fiduciary and policy responsibilities and duties set forth in state law (RCW 27.12.210) and continue to be responsive to their communities.

Those who support continued trustee appointments believe that:

- High annual election costs, up to several hundred thousand dollars for larger library systems, would divert scarce funds from the materials and services for which libraries were created.
- Very often there are few applicants for open trustee positions; if they were elective offices there may be serious difficulties filling them, as is currently the case with council positions in smaller towns and commissioner positions small special districts.
- Public libraries, a community's only source of free information on all sides of issues, could be vulnerable to pressure from special interest groups.

For these reasons, the Washington Library Association opposes legislation intended to make public library trustees elected offices and urges legislators to join in our opposition.

If it isn't broken, why fix it?