

## Fact Sheet: I-747 and Public Libraries

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The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide information on the future impact of Initiative 747\* on public library services available to Washington residents. The Washington State Department of Revenue estimates that library district tax revenue alone lost through 2007 will total over \$105 million.

Library districts are special purpose districts providing public library services to 70% of Washington State's residents. They rely on property taxes for up to 95% of their annual revenue. In 2001, library district property tax levies totaled only 2.5% of state property taxes. Municipal libraries operated by cities and towns don't have direct property tax funding, but their annual appropriations are dependent on municipal revenues, of which property tax is a major component.

Inflation has exceeded 1% in every year since 1962. Library materials prices and many other operational costs continue to escalate well beyond inflation. Now, the growing public expectation for expensive new computer-based information technologies in libraries—*in addition to traditional library services*—has placed a further strain on library resources.

With the revenue limitations imposed by Initiative 747, most libraries—particularly library districts—will be unable to maintain previous service levels. Since their three major expense areas are staffing, library materials, and information technology, library patrons may experience:

- Fewer staff available for assistance, longer lines at checkout and reference desks, fewer special programs, and reduced library hours due to staffing limitations.
- Longer waits for popular materials, a smaller selection of new titles, fewer licensed information databases, and fewer periodical subscriptions due to materials budget limitations.
- Less access to public access computers and increased response times due to technology budget limitations.

The alternative, available to library districts and municipalities, is frequent and costly levy limit override elections to seek voter approval for property tax levies at the pre-Initiative 747 levels.

I-747 will have a lasting impact on Washington's public library services. However, libraries remain committed to their historical mission of providing their constituents with the free and open access to information that's fundamental to a democratic society.

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\* Initiative 747, approved by voters in the November 6, 2001 general election and effective for 2002 property tax collections, limits total annual property tax levy increases to 1% or inflation, whichever is lower, plus the amount resulting from new construction and increases in valuation of state-assessed property. Revenue from new construction is intended to offset additional costs incurred to serve the increased population. State-assessed property is a very small percentage of total valuations. Annual voter approval is required for a greater increase.