

REPORT OF THE LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY LIBRARY SUPPORT IN THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

AUGUST 1968

[Editor's Note: Members of the Commission included: Chairman, David Stick, *Kitty Hawk*; Senator Mary Faye Brumby, *Murphy*; Senator Hector MacLain, *Lumberton*; Representative Charles W. Phillips, *Greensboro*; and Representative Thomas E. Strickland, *Goldsboro*. The Commission was created and members appointed by former Governor Dan Moore in response to a request made by North Carolinians for Better Libraries.]

FINDINGS OF THE COMMISSION

It is the finding of the Commission that, as the result of tradition rather than plan, the basic responsibility for financing our public library system is now being borne by local government.

In fiscal year 1966-1967 the figures were:

	Share	Per Capita	Money Available
Counties & Cities	73%	1.02	4,691,770
State Aid	10%	.16	666,250
Federal Aid	8%	.11	525,687
Private Donations, etc.	9%	.12	550,588
	100%	1.41	6,434,295

We find further that there is no mention of libraries in the Constitution of 1868, and that the local government is prohibited from using tax income for library support except in those 16 counties and a limited number of cities where the electorate has authorized a library tax by special referendum. In the other 84 counties any funds appropriated for library use must come from limited "non-tax" sources; yet in 1968, despite other widespread demands for these funds, public library services were provided in all of our 100 counties.

It is our finding also, that there has been a dramatic change in the function of public libraries during the past 20 years as the emphasis has shifted rapidly from recreational to educational use and public libraries have become an integral part of the continuing education process. A basic purpose of libraries is to make available to the individual citizen the vast accumulation of knowledge which man has recorded. In addition our public libraries are now used regularly for supplementary study by students in our public schools during weekends, holidays and after-school hours; they are a basic part of our new system of community colleges and technical institutes; they are used extensively by college students and in academic extension courses; and each year as modern technology become more sophisticated, industry and the business community are relying on them more and more for information and research.

Finally the Commission finds that the average of \$1.41 per capita available for library support throughout the state is considerably less than one-half the amount considered necessary to provide good library service.

Thus, because of insufficient funding, the great majority of the 332 public libraries in North Carolina are inadequately housed, staffed and stocked to meet these ever increasing demands for modern library service.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE COMMISSION

It is the conclusion of this Commission that North Carolinians, considering the limited funds available, are receiving relatively good library service. Pertinent factors are the establishment of regional library systems involving nearly half of our counties, with resultant savings in overhead and increases in service; the dedicated efforts of a hard core of highly qualified librarians; and the continued interest and support of library oriented and concerned citizens and civic groups throughout the state. Of equal importance are the outstanding services of the North Carolina State Library in providing central purchasing and processing of books; in coordinating an excellent inter-library loan program; in maintaining a statewide telephone reference service which is the first of its kind in the nation; in supervising the allocation of Federal assistance funds; and in providing guidance and assistance on a wide variety of other problems which daily face local and regional librarians.

The Commission concludes further, however, that *despite these efforts the great majority of North Carolinians still are not receiving adequate modern library services of the type already being made available to citizens in other states; and under the present system of financing public libraries North Carolinians can never expect the quality of library services they need and to which they are entitled.*

For it is our further conclusion that local government, to a large degree, has reached the end of its ability or willingness to provide funds for library support under the procedures now in force. Without a drastic change in the traditional library financing methods most local libraries will be fortunate at best to secure sufficient additional funds in the future to provide for the demands of the expanding population and the increased costs of book purchases and library operation.

We conclude also that since recent changes in population have not coincided with the established geographic boundaries of our cities and counties, many of the larger city libraries now are being called on to provide services for citizens who live in other towns and counties and are not sharing in the costs of these services. It has therefore become imperative to devise a system of statewide library support which is attuned to the demands of modern education and technology, which involves each citizen both in receiving equal library services and in paying a proportionate share of the cost, and which is broad enough in concept and far-reaching enough in scope to insure that at some time in the not too distant future every North Carolinian will have access to comprehensive modern library facilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMISSION

It is the recommendation of this Commission that the General Assembly of 1969 affirm the principle that all citizens of North Carolina should have available to them adequate modern public library services and facilities; and that it is the responsibility of the State to share with local government the basic cost of reaching these goals.

It is our further recommendation that the General Assembly clearly define the responsibility of each echelon of government in financing libraries, as has been done previously with regard to the operation of our public schools, highways, courts, health and welfare services, and in many other areas. Because of the dependence of North Carolina county and city governing bodies on the General Assembly for guidance and instruction it is our belief that no major improvement can be expected in overall library service without the adoption of such a practical and understandable long range plan for cooperative library support.

It is the specific recommendation of the Commission that the following division of responsibility be spelled out by the General Assembly:

Local Government

- 1.—Public library operation should remain under the control of local and regional library boards, with continued guidance and assistance from the State Library.
- 2.—The cost of providing library buildings should remain basically a local responsibility, with assistance from the Federal government and private sources.
- 3.—As a minimum, local government must maintain their present level of library support, and be encouraged to increase their support gradually through the use of tax revenue. This would call for a change whereby local governments can levy taxes for library support, without first having to receive voter approval.

State Government

- 4.—*The State of North Carolina should gradually assume equal responsibility, with local government, for public library support. To insure maximum results this should be accomplished over a period of several years with annual increases in State grants to public libraries amounting to the equivalent of approximately \$0.20 per capita, allocated according to a formula adopted by the State Library Board.* This would call for increased appropriations for State Aid to public libraries of approximately one million dollars each year on the basis of present population figures. Thus it is the specific recommendation of this Commission that the 1969 General Assembly increase appropriations for State Aid to public libraries to the equivalent of approximately \$0.35 per capita in the first year of the biennium and \$0.55 in the second year of the biennium.
- 5.—The General Assembly should provide increases in appropriations to the State Library adequate to insure that the existing pattern of services to local libraries will be intensified sufficiently to meet the demands brought on by the expansion of local public library services throughout the state, with special consideration to the need for competitive salary schedules for professional employees and a stronger book collection.