

Tom Nelson



24 April 2025

The Honorable Larry Rhoden, Governor
State of South Dakota
500 East Capitol Avenue
Pierre, South Dakota 57501

Dear Governor Rhoden,

As you are well aware, the South Dakota State Library has been under extreme distress since Governor Noem's budget proposal in December.

Within days, if not hours, after her address, the Secretary of Education instructed the State Librarian to begin the "dismantling" of the State Library. Some of which includes the elimination of:

- 10+ dedicated professional state employees who provide leadership for innovation and excellence in SD libraries and services to state government;
- technology and training for 58 databases, library software programs, certification and support;
- SD Braille and Talking Book Library which provides adaptive equipment and materials so that every South Dakotan has the opportunity to read;
- Literacy Programs for training, materials, and software for South Dakota communities participating in Summer Reading programs and other literacy programs throughout the year, and
- Interlibrary Loan that facilitated 33,900 loans for South Dakotans in 2024 through Share-It and the Interlibrary Courier.

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This is not acceptable and I suspect there are more essential programs and services also at risk!

House Bill 1041 was designed to accomplish the goal of dismantling the State Library. Upon introduction, HB 1041 was met by fierce and appropriate opposition from many legislators, and more importantly, the very knowledgeable and experienced South Dakota Library Association. The

association and several committee members made excellent and eloquent arguments which should have killed HB 1041 in committee! But instead it was referred to Joint Appropriations (with a DO NOT PASS recommendation), amended and put forth as a “compromise” that easily passed and received your signature.

The compromise bill which passed was supposed to preserve most of the staff and essential programs. In our current federal climate, the anticipated loss of grant dollars should have been anticipated and it appears that the end result will be the initial and devastating intent of the original HB 1041. This is not acceptable.

I seriously doubt that the outright abortion of our State Library was the intent of the legislature. Cuts to services and personnel like those that seem imminent need to be examined and explored and studied...not hit over the head with a tire-iron.

We are an extremely rural state and our local and school libraries are the intellectual and social fabric that binds many of our communities together. State Library, in multiple ways, has quietly and efficiently provided local libraries, individuals and other entities the tools and services to navigate vast information universe.

It is my hope that there is some action from your office, the Executive Board or Rules Committee that can halt this catastrophe until it is fully evaluated and a reasonable, long-term plan is established.

I am at your service.

Warm personal regards,

Tom Nelson, President

State Library of South Dakota