

Issue Brief:

Proposed Washington State Library Closure



The Governor's proposed 2002 supplemental budget includes the elimination of the Washington State Library effective October 15, 2002. It is one of 30 smaller agencies and programs proposed for elimination as part of a larger plan to address a serious revenue shortfall caused by the recent economic downturn.

The Washington State Library (WSL) was established by the 1853 Organic Act of the Territory of Washington. Its current services are focussed in five areas, each component supporting the other and minimizing duplication of resources.

- Support of library services to approximately 2,100 public, college, school, special and tribal libraries statewide, including administration of \$3 million in annual federal grant funds.
- Research and information services for the Legislature and state agency staff.
- Access to special resource collections, including the most comprehensive collection of Washington State documents and newspapers.
- Online access to local and state government information through Find-It! Washington and Find-It! Consumer.
- Library services for 13 state institutions

There are three common misconceptions about information services that the WSL provides:

- *Most of what the state government and legislature need is available online, at no cost, via the Internet.* Much of the free Internet information isn't accurate, credible, or current; quality information is commercially produced by publishers or information aggregators and is available at a cost.
- *Most of what the WSL has is available from other libraries.* A mid-1990s study showed that 60% of the State Library's collection was unique and not duplicated in the Olympia area.
- *The public doesn't use the State Library.* Local libraries borrow unique materials and researchers use collections and specialized staff expertise.

Detailed information about Washington State Library services, including usage, costs, and alternatives, may be found at <http://www.statelib.wa.gov/wslnews.cfm?NewsID=32>.

The Washington Library Association understands the severity of the state's economic situation and its impact on state government services. However, it strongly feels that the maintenance of the centralized unique information services provided through the WSL benefit Washington's citizens as a whole and must be maintained. A December WLA Executive Board resolution* pledged to work to retain the WSL by all means at its disposal.

* The WLA Executive Board resolution may be found at <http://www.wla.org/libleg/libleg.html>.