

**AALL CASE STUDY:
ORALL PROTECTS FUTURE OF COUNTY LAW LIBRARIES**
June 2010

The Challenge

In February 2005, Ohio legislators added language to the biennial budget bill (HB 66) that drastically altered the funding structure for Ohio’s county law libraries. Previously, County Commissioners were responsible for providing the law libraries with space and utilities in the county courthouse, shelving, and the salaries of up to 3 library employees. HB 66 gradually took away the responsibilities from the Commissioners so that by 2011, the libraries would pay 100% of salaries and benefits, and by 2012 they would pay 100% of their rent.

Without the subsequent efforts of the [Ohio Regional Association of Law Libraries](#) County Law Libraries Special Interest Group (ORALL County SIG) and their allies, this bill would have had devastating affects for Ohio’s county law libraries. This case study examines the ORALL County SIG’s successful efforts to protect the future of the county law libraries so that they will be able to continue serving the judges, attorneys, and pro se litigants that rely on them for access to up-to-date legal resources.

The Response



Reached out to allies and testified in opposition to HB 66

To develop strong opposition to HB 66, the ORALL County SIG worked closely with the AALL Government Relations Office, Ohio Bar members, the Ohio State Bar Association Law Libraries & Legal Information Services Committee and a paid lobbyist.

In March 2005, several county law librarians presented testimony before the Ohio House Finance and Appropriations Committee in opposition to HB 66. Members of the Committee were receptive to their concerns. Soon after the law librarians testified, the legislature passed HB 66 with additional language to create a 13-member state-wide Task Force to study the structure, funding and operations of Ohio’s county law libraries and make recommendations for the future. The Task Force had from September 2005 until June 2006 to prepare a report to the legislature and Chief Justice of the Ohio Supreme Court.

Several members of the law library community served as representatives to the new Task Force, including Kathleen Sasala, Director of the Cleveland Law Library Association who served as the Ohio State Bar Association representative.

Gathered data to prove the value and diversity of Ohio's county law libraries

Using a survey developed by Kathleen Sasala, county law librarians quickly gathered statistics on their libraries' diverse operations, collections, staffing, funding and services needs. In addition, a number of law librarians researched historical data and other county law library systems around the country.

In April 2005, several county law libraries met with the Court Administration Committee of the Ohio Judicial Conference and used the statistics to demonstrate the value of the county law libraries. Following this successful meeting, the Ohio Judicial Conference urged the removal of the bad language from HB 66.

Despite strong opposition from many county law libraries and their allies, Governor Bob Taft signed HB 66 into law in June 2005. Fortunately, most changes were delayed until 2007.

Celebrated passage of bill to restructure county law library system

In December 2008, after several years of negotiations between the Ohio State Bar Association, the Ohio Judicial Conference, and a coalition of county law library boards and bar associations who had the opportunity to participate in drafting the legislation, the legislature passed and Governor Ted Strickland signed into law a bill (HB 420) to restructure county law library funding.

The new law, which was based on the [Final Recommendations](#) of the Task Force, eliminated the graduated funding cuts that were put into effect by HB 66. Instead, it created a County Law Library Resources Board (CLLRB) in each county whose members are appointed by county commissioners, judges and the prosecuting attorney. The CLLRBs are responsible for the maintenance of county law libraries, as well as managing the coordination, acquisition, and utilization of legal resources for the entire county. CLLRBs also have the power to create multi-county partnerships and contract with other CLLRBs, private entities, public agencies, and a state-wide consortium of CLLRBs. The consortium will catalog each library's resources, facilitate state-wide resource sharing, negotiate contracts, and issue recommendations and guidelines to assist law libraries. The board is also required to employ a county law librarian who will act as the chief administrator of the CLLRB.

Current Status

CLLRBs gained authority for county law libraries on January 1, 2010 and a reconstituted Task Force began regular meetings to monitor the transition from private association to resources board. The broad language in HB 420 allows each county to cater their CLLRB to the needs of the county. Some CLLRBs coordinate the purchase of legal resources countywide and pay for them themselves, which has allowed for some bulk purchasing discounts; others coordinate the purchase, make the initial payment and then charge each agency their share (still allowing for the bulk discounts); and others simply deny the purchase of any legal resources not housed in the library.

The current consortium members are Mary Jenkins, Hamilton County Law Library; Ken Kozlowski, Ohio Supreme Court; John Leutz, Ohio County Commissioners Association;

Kathleen Sasala, Ohio State Bar Association; and Judge Charles A. Schneider, Ohio Judicial Conference.

The consortium has until January 1, 2011 to hire an executive director and find a location for their operation. Starting in early 2011, CLLRBs will be required to turn over 2% of their 2010 revenue to the consortium.

Conclusion

The successful fight to ensure the future of Ohio's country law libraries would not have been possible without the outstanding work of the ORALL County SIG. In recognition of their tireless efforts to protect these valuable institutions, the ORALL County SIG will be presented with the 2010 AALL Robert L. Oakley Advocacy Award at the [AALL Public Policy Update](#) (G3) on Monday, July 12 during the AALL Annual Meeting in Denver, Colorado. We are pleased that Mary Jenkins will accept the award on behalf of the ORALL County SIG.