
Javits

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By Mr. JAVITS (for himself and Mr. KENNEDY): S. 1124. A bill to promote the further development of public library services, and for other purposes: to the Committee on Labor and Human Resources.

NATIONAL LIBRARY ACT

Mr. JAVITS. Mr. President, Senator KENNEDY and I are today filing a study bill for a proposed National Library Act. This bill has been initiated at the behest of the Urban Libraries Council and the National Citizens Emergency Committee to Save Our Public Libraries, and has been supported for study purposes by these two important library groups and the Legislative Committee of the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies. It is a document which deserves the critical attention of those in the library community.

The purpose of introducing this legislation at this time is to provide a focal point for debating the key issues for proposed new library legislation in connection with the White House Conference on Library and Information Services to be held in November 1979. It is hoped that, after an opportunity for full discussion, the White House Conference delegates will make recommendations as to what should be included in a final form of the bill so that it can be revised accordingly and then advanced through committees for floor consideration and enactment.

A draft of this legislation has been submitted for review and comment in advance of filing to representatives of the American Library Association, the Association of Research Libraries, the Association of American Universities, the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, and the White House Conference staff.

The principal provisions of the bill cover the following:

First. Establishment of a National Library Agency to aid, augment, and support local and State library services, but in conformance with appropriate existing Federal library policy not to exercise direct control over their operations or policies.

Second. Provision for direct financial assistance to public libraries for operating expenses on a matching Federal-State-local basis. The matching fund formula is one proposed in a study prepared for the National Commission on Library and Information Science. We recognize that some States, due to fiscal constraints, may not be able to meet the level of matching called for in the formula at the outset, and the bill, therefore, provides for alternative funding to meet specific State needs.

Third. Continuation of the program of Federal aid for public library construction, incorporating the present provisions of title III of the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA), expanded to include the conversion of existing structures for library use as well as new construction.

Fourth. Establishment of a program of Federal grants to States for implementing library training, job information services, English language instruction, library services for the handicapped, extension of library services to publicly supported institutions, outreach programs, and other services for the economically and educationally disadvantaged, and technical and other special reference services.

Fifth. Reenactment of LSCA provisions authorizing Federal funding of interlibrary cooperation programs, expanded to include the development and maintenance of library and information networks within and between States.

Sixth. Special training programs for library personnel to develop skills related to community needs, information specialists, and learners’ advisory services, as a supplement to more formal education support authorized under title II-B of the Higher Education Act.

There are a number of important questions which have been intentionally left open to stimulate further consideration. As a member of the advisory committee to the White House Conference, I will urge that representatives to the Conference address fully the implications of these questions for the future of Federal library policy:

Where should the proposed National Library Agency be placed within the Federal governmental structure? Among the possibilities are the Library of Congress, the Office of Education—or its successor agency or department—or establishment as an independent body such as a public corporation, commission, or council.

Who should set policy for the agency? Should the act be expanded to include school, college, medical, research, or other libraries?

These and other issues will not be finally resolved until after there has been an opportunity to discuss them fully at the White House conference. Our objective in filing this bill is to help stimulate such discussion and give it focus. Every provision of the bill is subject to deletion, revision, refinement, or expansion after the members of the general public and the library community have had a full opportunity to be heard.

To aid in informed discussions the various provisions of the study bill, we are incorporating into the record selected materials which highlight the considerations that have gone into this draft. With the help of these materials, and constructive discussion and debate, it is our hope that this bill will provide the cornerstone for major legislation to strengthen our Nation’s library and information resources for the benefit of all citizens.