



NEW JERSEY LIBRARY CONSTRUCTION BOND ACT

PUBLIC QUESTION # 1

Question on the Ballot:

Do you approve the “New Jersey Library Construction Bond Act”? This bond act authorizes the State to issue bonds in the aggregate principal amount of \$125 million. The proceeds of the bonds will be used to provide grants to public libraries. The grants will be used to build, equip and expand public libraries to increase capacity and serve the public.

Interpretive Statement on the Ballot:

Approval of this bond act will allow the State to sell \$125 million in State general obligation bonds. Proceeds from the bonds will be used to provide grants to construct, expand and equip public libraries. Municipalities or counties that fund public libraries will match the grant amount. The municipality or county may solicit private funding to support its match. The State Librarian, in consultation with the President of Thomas Edison State University, will set eligibility criteria for the grants.

LWVNJ Education Fund

Background:

If approved, the State of New Jersey can borrow \$125 million for capital project grants to public libraries. The municipality or county that funds the library seeking such a grant must put up half of the cost of the project for which grant funds are sought, but may solicit and receive grants or funds from any private source to support its required share of the project. The Office of Legislative Services estimates that the total debt service costs to the State may range from \$233 million to \$300 million spread over 35 years.

A Capital Improvement Survey of local public libraries, done by the New Jersey Library Association in late 2014, found that most libraries reported having capital needs, from upgrades to become ADA compliant to space, electrical, or furniture improvements. The survey did not, however, indicate the severity of these needs, nor the potential for funding them with local tax dollars.

Due to the challenging economic times, few libraries receive regular capital appropriations.

If the act is approved by the voters, the State Librarian and the President of Thomas Edison State University will establish criteria for grants and evaluate the proposals from local libraries against the criteria, and prepare a list of eligible projects.

Reasons to vote yes:

- The additional funding could improve access to public libraries for many vulnerable residents.
- The additional funding could help keep public libraries abreast of increasing technology needs.
- The construction and equipment purchases involved would provide an economic stimulus to our New Jersey economy.

Reasons to vote no:

- New Jersey already has an extremely high debt burden. This bond issue would add to it.
- The amount is very restricted in purpose, and does not allow libraries to apply grants to their greatest needs, which may be personnel rather than space-related.
- The criteria for distributing funds have not been developed.