

Illinois Library Association Secretary of State Candidates Questionnaire

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● **Do you have a library card and what was the reason for your last library visit?**

Yes. I visited my local library with my two older daughters recently. Having younger children makes me appreciate our libraries even more and witness firsthand the knowledge and fun they provide, regardless of age.

● **What is the value of the library in 21st century Illinois communities?**

Libraries represent the heartbeat of our communities and play critical roles when it comes to reading and learning materials not only for children and students, but also when it comes to help and support for adults. As the former president of the Illinois Community Colleges and member of the City of Chicago's Library Board, I understand the importance and value that our libraries serve. We must constantly explore new ways to enhance their mission so they continue to serve our communities effectively.

● **Given the disparity of local funding for libraries, what is the role of the Secretary of State in assuring access to electronic resources and other materials for Illinois residents?**

The Secretary of State serves as Illinois' chief librarian and has a responsibility to expand services and close the digital divide. I plan to implement a universal "License to Read" program which will improve library access by making more services and resources digitally available, increase sharing between different libraries and provide students with tutoring services. Part of my plan includes introducing state legislation aimed at lowering the prices that publishers charge libraries for e-books and audio books and making them more available to residents across the state – regardless of where they live. This legislation, which several other states have passed, will make learning materials more available and our libraries more equitable.

● **By statute, all Illinois residents are served by public elementary, secondary, and community college school districts. Currently one million Illinois residents do not receive public library services. Would you support a similar provision to make library services available to all Illinois residents?**

Many Illinoisans who live in rural, underserved or unincorporated areas not served by a library district have to pay hundreds of dollars annually to obtain library services. This includes students who cannot borrow books because of residency requirements. Some suburban districts do give unincorporated students free access (without paying fees or property taxes to fund it). Some other communities apply a property tax fee on unincorporated homeowners, but most don't build in the costs. We are looking into some ways we can ensure residents in these areas – particularly students – and many of whom live in low-income areas – have access to learning through libraries. This is an equity/access issue that impacts the entire state and has been an

issue for the last several decades. My License to Read initiative will also help by allowing digital access to materials as a first start; however, I would like to convene a task force to think about ways to further correct this problem.

● We are seeing increased numbers of challenges to library materials in Illinois and surrounding states. As state librarian, how will you support Illinois libraries and library workers' ability to develop and maintain diverse and inclusive collections and services?

As the state's chief librarian, I will voice strong opposition to the banning and removal of books from Illinois library shelves, which threatens our nation's democratic values and prevents the public from accessing reading materials of their choice.

Extremists with political agendas have targeted libraries and have harassed librarians. This is an alarming phenomenon that's occurring throughout the nation, including Illinois. This scourge of censorship is having a dangerous and chilling effect on our democracy and a polarizing impact on our communities as political agendas attempt to divide them. These efforts are not about books; they are about ideas that certain individuals disagree with and believe no one should think.

Furthermore, new restrictions not only challenge an individual school system or library, but legislation in certain states is aimed at eliminating the availability of books in schools and libraries all together, despite the fact that the books are not required reading for anyone. In neighboring Missouri, state lawmakers passed a law, which took effect this school year, that empowers prosecutors to arrest, assess fines and even jail school librarians who fail to monitor books in their libraries.

Librarians are dedicated to their schools and communities and serve out of a love of knowledge, reading and helping people. It's absurd to think that some seek to harass them or pass laws to have them jailed. Librarians deserve our thanks and support and a safe environment in which to work.