

## Plea for school librarians

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OLYMPIA – Advocates for school libraries took their case to the state capitol Wednesday, urging lawmakers to set aside more money for libraries and teaching-certified librarians.

Voters "can't believe that this is even an issue," said Lisa Layera Brunkan, a Spokane mother and school volunteer who's organized an online petition drive. "It seems to be one of these crazy things where everyone assumed the library was safe."

Some lawmakers are supportive. State Sen Tracey Eide, calling school librarians "an endangered species," said it's senseless to lay off librarians while trying to boost reading scores. Eide, D-Federal Way, is sponsoring Senate Bill 6380, which would set aside more money for librarians and give districts \$12 per student for library materials.

"This is new money, money that the districts desperately need," Brunkan said.

But lawmakers in both parties voiced reservations about wading into the budget-balancing decisions of locally elected school boards.

"So now we're going to have maybe math or science teachers come and go 'Hey, we want the same thing for us,' " said state Sen. Steve Hobbs, D-Lake Stevens. "... I'm a little concerned about having the big state come in and say 'This is what you have to do.' "

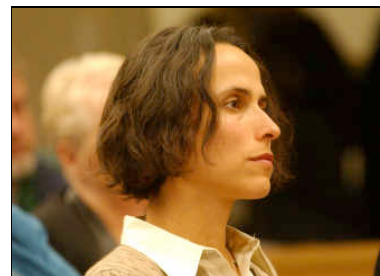
State Sen. Dale Brandland, R-Bellingham, had similar concerns. Local school officials "were elected to make priorities," he said.

Galvanized by last year's decision by Spokane Public Schools to cut 10 librarian positions to part time as part of \$10.8 million in annual spending reductions, Brunkan and other local mothers have lobbied lawmakers, school officials and the media, trying to reverse what they view as a dangerously short-sighted trend by budget writers. To date, 4,000 people have signed their online petition calling for more support of school libraries.

In an information age, librarians told the Senate committee Wednesday, students must know how to navigate and weigh information from different sources. State librarian Jan Walsh compared the issue to the move in recent years to cut back on required gym classes, noting that schools are now battling widespread student obesity.

"Do we want to make that same error by diminishing the school library, which is central to teaching children to learn?" said Walsh. "It's unprecedented that we would ignore the decline of something so essential to their growth and development."

In Spokane, school officials say they're more interested in a proposal from state Rep. Don Barlow, D-



Lisa Layera Brunkan, a Spokane mother, is part of a statewide push for more money for school libraries and librarians. On Wednesday, she took her case to lawmakers in Olympia. (RICHARD ROESLER The Spokesman-Review)

**Audio:** [Excerpts from Wednesday's arguments](#)  
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Spokane, that would steer more money into student support programs, including libraries and counselors. Barlow and a dozen other lawmakers, including state Rep. Timm Ormsby, D-Spokane, are backing House Bill 2773.

"It's a little broader," said Mark Anderson, Spokane Public Schools' associate superintendent for school support services. As the district understands the Senate bill, he said, it forces school districts to spend the state's money on librarians and libraries "but doesn't provide any new money.

"We'd be carving it out of our current allocation," he said.

Barlow's bill is awaiting a hearing in the House education committee.