February 27, 2019

House Committee on Ways & Means
Statement on HB 2, relating to ad valorem taxation

On behalf of the Texas Library Association’s more than 6,500 members, we want to share our concerns about HB 2, relating to ad valorem taxation caps and its negative impact on vital public library services in Texas.

As tax payers, we understand the burden ever increasing property taxes place on Texans. However, as professionals in public, K-12, college and university, and specialized libraries, we also know that state policy over many years has determined that property taxes should be the primary source of funding for many valuable, essential local services.

With the majority of public library funding coming from local taxes, HB 2 sets a dangerous precedent for the state to limit local governments’ ability to provide the valuable services which citizens are accustomed to receiving. As local governments begin to feel the very real impact of the restrictions on their ability to meet communities’ needs, they will be forced to make difficult decisions between public safety and other quality of life issues. These choices will not be driven by community priorities, and preferences, but by the revenue restrictions imposed by state policy. When revenue options are restricted – what is a city do but decide whether the public parks or police are more important? How are local governments to choose between fire-fighters or books, literacy and workforce development or water and sewer services when all are essential to the health, well-being, and quality of life in their communities?

While the bill provides for an election to increase the property tax, this is somewhat disingenuous. The playing field between cities/counties seeking increased taxes to provide services which the public has asked for, and those opposing any tax increase, no matter what the intended purpose is not level. Government entities are prohibited from promoting and advocating for their position, while the opposition is not held to these same requirements. All facts need to be presented clearly to voters when they are considering funding for essential public services.

As the Legislature works through the complicated property tax reform issues, we urge members to recognize that local governments already have a check in place – local elections. Local officials must justify their use of taxpayer dollars each time they are on the ballot.

Sincerely,

Jennifer LaBoon
TLA President

Dana Braccia
Executive Director