

Giannoulas Pushes To Enhance Protections For Libraries And Librarians

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SPRINGFIELD - Furthering his commitment to the Right to Read, Illinois Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulas is spearheading legislation that underscores the vital role of librarians in providing essential educational resources and ensures those individuals can go to work without fear and intimidation.

HB 4567, sponsored by State Representative Anne Stava-Murray (81st District – Downers Grove) and State Senator Laura Murphy (28th District – Des Plaines), would increase protections for libraries, librarians and library employees from threats and violence. The measure passed out of committee today and now heads to the House floor.

“Our librarians and libraries have faced an onslaught of threats of violence and ideological intimidation for simply serving their communities,” said Giannoulas, who also serves as State Librarian. “We have seen an escalation of violence seeking to censor and restrict information. This is harmful, not only to these public servants, but to our democracy as a whole. In the face of these threats, this bill highlights the commitment of our state to protecting library workers, access to information and the free exchange of ideas.”

The bill would give law enforcement and State’s Attorneys the tools needed to charge a threat made against a library or a public employee in the same manner that currently exists for schools and elected officials.

The legislation comes after several libraries across the state, including the Illinois State Library Building, experienced bomb and other violent threats. Between July and September of 2023, at least 22 known bomb threats were received that required local and state police response. Several libraries endured repeat threats.

“Throughout the state and the nation, library professionals continue to face threats to their personal safety and welfare,” said Cynthia Robinson, executive director for the Illinois Library Association (ILA). “The ILA strongly condemns all forms of violence, threats of violence, and other acts of intimidation in Illinois libraries.”

Other states including Colorado, California, Iowa, Tennessee, Utah, Texas and Hawaii have faced similar threats to their libraries and staff.

“This legislation will ensure our library workers have the same protections against threats and harassment as other public officials and human service providers,” Stava-Murray said. “Protecting the Right to Read in Illinois also means protecting the people who make it possible.”

Each threat requires local law enforcement to spend time and resources investigating and ensuring the public’s safety. The proposed measure would require the offender to reimburse first responders for the cost associated with the threat response.

“Our librarians and libraries provide for the most fundamental exchange of ideas and knowledge, and we will not let them be intimidated from doing so,” said Murphy. “This measure protects them and the treasure of our libraries while also ensuring our law enforcement’s time and taxpayer money are not being wasted.”

The measure would also allow law enforcement to take action against threats made by electronic communications and social media.

The proposal does not create new penalties but guarantees libraries and librarians are protected by law in the same manner as schools and other facilities serving vulnerable populations, such as children and older adults.