IT’S NOT YOUR GRANDMOTHERS LIBRARY ANYMORE

By Hon. Charles A. Schneider, Chair, Law Library Consortium

In 2007 The General Assembly passed legislation that would change the operation of county law libraries. The initial legislation phased out the county’s responsibility for staff compensation and to provide space and utilities. In 2009 the legislature adopted Am. Sub. HB 420 which fundamentally changed the structure and operation of law libraries. What was once a private association being funded by public funds and housed in a public facility became a county agency.

One of the purposes of the new structure was to better coordinate the purchase and delivery of legal materials and services for all county agencies. In addition a statewide consortium of county law library resources boards was established to help coordinate more efficient purchasing of legal resource materials for its members.

I believe (not unmindful of my significant bias as I was Chair of the Task Force that made the recommendations to the legislature and serve as the current Chair of the Consortium) that the statewide consortium has been very successful – beyond my wildest expectations. And we are not done.

All of the county law library resource boards (LLRBs) have embraced their mission and with the support of other agencies in their jurisdiction, have saved counties around the state tens of thousands of dollars by negotiating better deals when purchasing legal resources and eliminating much duplication. The Consortium has negotiated substantial reductions on purchase contracts that LLRBs can utilize. More important the Consortium, has purchased hundreds of thousands of dollars of legal materials for its members. Many of these purchases represent the only new publications many of our members have received in years. More than half of our members receive more in purchases than they pay in dues.

The Ohio Attorney General has just provided yet another tool that counties can use as a result of the 2009 legislation. OAG opinion 2014-030 was published on July 30, 2014. It concludes, “when an LLRB deems it necessary, and subject to the approval of the board of county commissioners, an LLRB may” contract with and pay a vendor to digitize public records of the county recorder, and to post those records and the public records of the clerk of court on a third-party website. This is an expansion of OAG opinion 2011-036 defining “legal reference services” (which limits the LLRBs authority to spend its funds) to include making available public land records of the county recorder and records of the clerk of court.

What is important about these opinions is that they sanction exactly what the goal of the LLRB was when it was created: increase the efficiency and expansion of the purchase and distribution of legal services.

I understand that everything is not perfect in Mudville. Some counties and the LLRB do not fully appreciate the opportunities that are available as a result of the new structure. We all tend to be a bit territorial at times. However, given the broad definition of legal services that the Ohio Attorney General has adopted I encourage every county to reach out and work will their local LLRB to find ways that legal services can be better provided for everyone. I am confident that you will find a willing hand at the other end.