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CONTACT: JANN PHENIX BROWN,  
327-3743

## LIBRARY DISTRICT BILL SENT TO GOVERNOR

Because of a little luck and a lot of hard work, the bill that sets in motion an election to create a library district to support the Westbank Community Library passed its final legislative hurdle Friday and was sent to the governor for his signature.

When board members of the Westbank Library decided to approach state Sen. Gonzalo Barrientos, a Democrat, and state Rep. Terry Keel, a Republican, about sponsoring enabling legislation to create a stable source of funding for the community library, the possibility of passing such a bill seemed slim.

The concept was, after all, new to Texas, although library districts exist in more than 20 other states. Also the Legislature was considering major changes in the state's taxing structure, and the idea of a new kind of taxing entity faced intense scrutiny this session.

"Passage of the bill is a tribute to the many Westbank library supporters who went to hearings, wrote letters, sent faxes and even contacted people in other cities, asking them to talk to their legislators about the library district bill. Also certain legislators took special interest in the bill after fifth grader Hayes Davenport's endearing presentation in committee hearings," said library board member Jann Phenix Brown."

Once the governor's approval of the legislation is certain, library board members will begin to collect comments from the Westbank community regarding the proposed library district. "The library has thrived for 14 years because of unflagging community support. As we, hopefully, move into a new phase of more stable funding for the library, that support will continue to be a

critical part of the library's continued existence."

The steps to establishing a library district are these: After a petition signed by 5 percent of the people who voted in the last gubernatorial election who live inside the district's proposed boundaries is presented to the Travis County Commissioners Court, along with a check for the estimated cost of the election, the commissioners will call an election on the question of creating a library district.

Assuming the petition effort is successful, an election will likely be called sometime next year. The Westbank community will then vote whether or not to support a library district through a sales tax. The amount of the sales tax to be considered in the election has not yet been determined, but it cannot be more than 1/2 of one cent.

Austin residents will not be able to vote in the election because a library district cannot be created in an area that is served by a tax-supported municipal library. If the library district is approved by voters, Austin residents will continue to pay a card fee to use the Westbank Library, just as out-of-Austin residents pay a card fee to use the Austin library now. Those who live within the library district's boundaries will no longer pay a card fee.

"Statewide, people in the library community are thrilled about the passage of this bill. Because of the efforts of many local people, new libraries can be formed and established libraries expanded. Our efforts may someday make an important difference in a child's life for generations to come," said library director Beth Fox.

"Without veteran lobbyist Dick Brown, who voluntarily spent many hours on this bill in the middle of a busy session, we would not have a chance to vote on a library district," Fox added. In addition to Sen. Barrientos and Rep. Keel's efforts, Rep. Sherri Greenberg pushed hard to get this bill past. Since redistricting, Rep. Greenberg no longer represents this area, so we are

especially grateful for her help. Rep. Elliot Naishtat is another member of the Travis County delegation who signed on as a co-sponsor of the bill.”