

Library Law Promulgated

On January 4, the ROC Library Law passed its third reading in the Legislative Yuan with the full support of lawmakers, laying a strong foundation for the future development of library services.

The law is the first of its kind in the ROC. Over the years the number of libraries in the Taiwan area has risen to over 5,000 (including the National Central Library, 562 public libraries, 158 university libraries, 3,715 primary and secondary school libraries, and 573 special libraries) with a combined staff exceeding 15,000. Librarians appealed for the drafting of the Library Law in view of the heavy responsibilities of the library system, the government's increased attention to educational reform, and the development of Taiwan's information infrastructure. The need for the law has been especially pressing since the repealing of the Publishing Law, which stipulated the rules for book deposits by domestic publishers. Under the new law, the NCL becomes the repository for domestically released publications and is responsible for compiling a complete bibliography of these publications, including books, periodicals, newspapers, AV materials, electronic media, and Internet resources.

The Library Law consists of 20 articles, which are summarized below.

Article 1: The Library Law was drafted to promote the sound development of libraries, provide complete library services, advance education, enhance culture, support academic research, and advocate lifelong education.

Article 2: The law defines "libraries" as facilities that collect, arrange, and preserve publication resources and provide services for the public and specific groups. The aforementioned publications are books, periodicals, newspapers, audio-visual materials, electronic media and other online publications.

Article 3: The competent authorities of this law at the Central Government level is the Ministry of Education. The competent authorities at the special municipality, county, and city levels are the local governments of those jurisdictions.

Article 4: Government agencies and academic institutions should establish libraries or encourage individuals, corporations, or other organizations to do so in order to meet actual needs. The law further distinguishes libraries into five categories according to their competent authorities and scope of service. These are: the National Central Library; public libraries; university and college libraries; primary and secondary school libraries; and special libraries.

Article 5: The establishment and operation standards of libraries will be determined by the Central Government authority.

Article 6: The technology and standard for book classification, cataloging, file creation, and accession will be formulated by the National Central Library or professional corporations/organizations designated by the Central Government authority.

Article 7: Libraries should provide readers with fair, free, timely, and convenient resources. These services should comply with fair-use stipulations in the Copyright Law.

Article 8: Regulations are to be drafted governing the handling of library services on the basis of balancing the rights and obligations of library users.

Article 9: Libraries should draw up budgets to execute their functions, which include book acquisition, cataloging, storage, display, reference consulting, information searching, document delivery, R&D, international exchange, database establishment, and special reader services (for the sight- and hearing-impaired), among others.

Article 10: Libraries should employ directors, managers, and professional staff to carry out the duties outlined above.

Article 11: Local competent authorities may form committees to plan, coordinate, and promote their library development.

Article 12: All libraries shall establish organizations and information networks to promote inter-library cooperation with the aim of enhancing the collection, management, and use of library resources.

Article 13: All types of publications can be loaned, exchanged, or donated among libraries under the principle of resource sharing.

Article 14: Books that are damaged, lose their preservation value, or are infrequently used may be discarded from a library collection so long as such removals do not exceed three percent of the total collection in a given year.

Article 15: In order to maintain an integral collection of books published in the ROC, every publisher is required to deposit one copy of each of their publications at the National Central Library and the National Parliamentary Library.

Article 16: The Central Government authority should form library guidance schema.

Article 17: Local competent authorities should regularly implement evaluation systems.

Article 18: The National Central Library shall make notice of the deposit deadline to publishers that violate Article 15 of this law. A fine of up to 10 times the set price of publication may be imposed. Consecutive fines may be issued by the National Central Library until the publication is submitted.

Article 19: All fines stipulated in this law must be paid by a certain deadline. Disciplinary action may be taken against those that fail to comply.

Article 20: This law becomes effective on the day of its promulgation.