



# Jeff Mursau

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 36<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Assembly Committee on Urban and Local Affairs  
February 3, 2016

AB 704: Tribal Colleges and Joint County Libraries

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. Thank you for taking the time to hear Assembly Bill 704 this morning.

I represent Menominee County and the College of Menominee Nation (CMN), which is located in Menominee County. Menominee County is unique, among Wisconsin's counties, because much of the county consists of the Menominee reservation and the county has no incorporated municipalities.

Until about 2012, the county maintained a public library in Keshena. In 2012, the county closed that library and turned all of the materials over to the College of the Menominee Nation, which is also located in Keshena, and signed a memorandum of understanding with the tribe to provide library service to residents of the tribe and other residents of Menominee County. This arrangement has generally worked very well for both the county and the college. However, under current state law, libraries must be established under chapter 43 of the statutes to be considered public libraries for various purposes, such as membership in public library systems. This bill would establish a framework for the College of the Menominee Nation's library to be considered a public library, under chapter 43 of the statutes, so that the tribe and the county can continue to partner with each other to provide high-quality library services and fully participate in the Nicolet Federated Library System.

We worked for months with the County, the CMN, Legislative Council, and the Department of Public Instruction to craft a bill that would allow this change to occur while also adhering to the requirements under current law for membership in a public library system. Specifically, the tribal college must submit annually to the public library board an accounting of expenditures of any funding received from the county and make library use free to county residents. An additional requirement of the bill, is a tribal college-library must create a three member library board with one member each from the college, the county, and the American Indian Tribe or band that controls the college.

The Department of Public Instruction and Legislative Council is here today and can help answer any questions you may have on the bill.

# College of the Menominee Nation

N 1172 State Hwy 47/55  
Keshena, WI 54135

P.O. Box 1179  
(715) 799-5600

February 3, 2016

Good Morning,

For the record, my name is Verna Fowler. I am an enrolled member of the Menominee Indian tribe and a resident of the Reservation for the past 36 years. In 1992, I graduated from the University of North Dakota-Grand Forks with a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership at the Post-Secondary level. It was then that the Menominee Tribal Legislature, my tribe's governing body, asked me to return home to start a Tribal College. The legislators and others in the tribe were concerned about the number of Menominee who were entering Wisconsin colleges and universities only to drop out because they were not well prepared for the academic experience.

Thank you for the opportunity to enter my planned testimony addressing Assembly Bill 0704 into today's record. This is an important issue for the Menominee Tribe, Menominee County, and the College of Menominee Nation,

For years Library service for our County residents has been the bare minimum. The Menominee Tribe provided facilities, an unlicensed librarian and building fixtures, while Menominee County, to whom the responsibility belonged, contributed \$15,000.

Three years ago our Tribe was facing budget issues and having difficulty keeping the Library open. The facility was closed evenings, weekends and often during the day. Internet access and computers were not available for patrons until the College donated several PCs and paid for the Library's internet access.

In the meantime, the College built a new \$4 million Academic Library on its Keshena campus with state-of-the-art technology. Considering the financial issues of the Tribe and County, I approached both entities and requested that we enter into a partnership. This partnership permits the County and Tribe to control the Library and retain responsibility for it, but permits the College to manage and operate it. In short order we reached total agreement and in a spirit of cooperation entered into a Memorandum of Agreement to that effect

# Menominee County

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February 3, 2016

Wis. Assembly Cmte on Urban and Local Affairs  
Attn: Rep. Edward Brooks, Chairman  
Room 20 North, State Capitol  
P.O. Box 8952  
Madison, WI 53708

**SUBJECT: SUPPORT FOR AB704**

Dear Hon. Brooks:

I want to thank you and the members of your committee for considering AB704, which is a bill introduced by Rep. Mursau that will enable counties and tribal colleges to operate a joint public library. With this important piece of legislation, Menominee County will be able to continue offering its residents a one of a kind library experience and expose them to the world of learning on the College of Menominee Nation campus. I believe the opportunities for adults, children and families as a result of this unique merger are varied and many.

This partnership between the County, College of Menominee Nation and the Menominee Tribe began a few years ago. Prior to this, Menominee County had no viable way to offer its residents library services, complete with a library board, director and staff, facility and location. With only 1.26% of the County's land base being taxable, tough decisions on whether and to what extent we can fund anything come too frequently and at a very heavy cost. The Menominee Tribe had fiscal limitations of its own. Fortunately, the College of Menominee Nation had the ability to tap into resources the County and Tribe could not. As a result, what we have for library services now compared to five years ago is truly remarkable, and testament to the great work and resolve local leadership can muster during uncommon hardship. The Committee's passage of this bill will affirm this fact.

On behalf of Menominee County, I want to thank Rep. Mursau, Dr. Verna Fowler, and Chairman Besaw for their aggressive efforts on this legislation. I also apologize to the Committee for not being present at the hearing; the weather was just not conducive to safe travel.

Sincerely,

  
Jeremy C. Weso  
Administrative Coordinator

cc: Menominee County Board of Supervisors  
File



S. Verna Fowler  
Academic Library

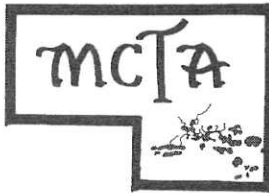
Menominee Public Library





# Menominee County Taxpayers Association, Inc.

P.O. Box 666



Keshena, WI 54135

Tuesday February 2, 2016

State Representative Edward Brooks  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 8952  
Madison, WI 53708

Good Morning Representative Brooks and members of the Assembly Committee on Urban & Local Affairs,

My name is Peter Theo and on behalf of the Menominee County Taxpayers Association (MCTA) I submit this written testimony in support of Assembly Bill 704 relating to tribal college and county joint libraries. MCTA is an association consisting of property owners in Menominee County with active members in Wisconsin and across the country.

Menominee County has experienced financial challenges that few counties have ever, or will ever face. Given the fact the county's tax base is extremely low, the county has struggled for many years to provide adequate services for its residents. Therefore, Menominee County has worked with the Menominee Tribe to search for ways they can share more services and share in the costs.

Consolidating the county library with the new tribal college library is one of those proposals which make financial sense. As property taxpayers in Menominee County, MCTA members welcome the sharing of services, especially when it means they have access to a new, modern college library.

We appreciate the committee's consideration of AB 704 and ask that you vote the bill out of committee. Should you have any questions, please contact me at the numbers listed below.

Respectfully,

Peter Theo, Lobbyist for the MCTA Management Team

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