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Pines & Plains Libraries Sues Elbert County Commissioners

Pines and Plains Libraries, whose public libraries serve Elbert County with branches in Elizabeth, Kiowa, Elbert, and Simla, has sued the Elbert County Board of County Commissioners over a recently adopted policy it believes violates a state law protecting public libraries from political interference. The policy, adopted by the BOCC on December 20, just before the Christmas holidays, seeks to control the qualifications, appointment, tenure, and termination of the library district's board of trustees. The district argues that the Colorado Library Law places these subjects beyond the authority of the BOCC. County Commissioners acted on the policy without posting it on the county's web site and refused a request by a Pines and Plains trustee to postpone its consideration until the public had a chance to review it.

Discussing the lawsuit's background, Pines and Plains Director Tim Miller stated, "We would have preferred to resolve this problem without a lawsuit, but the BOCC's refusal to put off action and the fact that court rules required the suit to be filed by January 17 made this impossible. We hope the commissioners will act responsibly and preserve public resources by agreeing to revise the policy in a way which complies with Colorado law."

Board of Trustees President Susan Saint Vincent provided further details. "The Library Law allowed Elbert County voters to establish a library district as a separate government unit, independent of the county," she explained, "and our voters did just that in 2000. Colorado's legislature intended that libraries be free from political interference so that they can serve their missions of furthering lifelong learning and intellectual freedom. Library trustees need to be selected based on their competence and commitment to the goals of our district, not politics."