

Save Our Escondido Library Coalition

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Scathing report of LS&S performance in Oregon fuels opposition to outsourcing of Escondido library

Concrete evidence demonstrates LS&S poor choice for library operator

Escondido, CA: Despite unanimous opposition from the Escondido Library Board of Trustees, Library Foundation, American Library Association, and in the face of overwhelming objection from the community, the Escondido City Council majority continues its path to execute a contract with Library System and Services (LS&S), a Maryland company, to take over operation of the Escondido library. However, LS&S's competence has been brought into question in a report which surfaced recently.

A 2016 assessment of the performance of Jackson County Oregon libraries run by LS&S can only be described as 'scathing'. The assessment was commissioned by the Jackson County Library District Board to determine how the services delivered by the Library District and its contractor LS&S measure up to minimum standards. Although the new District has only managed the library since mid-2015, LS&S has operated their library for over 10 years. The link to the full report and specific excerpts is below.

The *Jackson County Library Services Performance Review and Quality Assessment*, outlines significant deficiencies in how LS&S is operating the library. Other problems with having LS&S as a contractor, such as would be the case in Escondido, were also evident and very troubling.

Some of the problems highlighted include:

- The library operations failed to meet 63% of the minimum 'essential specifications' for overall performance.
- The report notes that 28% of the fund given to LS&S fall into a category of 'other' and the exact use is not known.
- The lack of transparency makes it *"impossible for the Board to determine if it is getting good value for the dollar."*
- LS&S's definition of proprietary information is extremely limiting and frustrates the ability of the Board to certify that standards are being met.
- The library services grossly underserved the Latino community and *"...gives the overall impression that Spanish speakers are not considered part of the community nor welcome at the Library."*
- The collection does not adequately reflect the diverse interests of the community.
- Staff had the lowest qualifications, salaries and benefits when compared with other Oregon libraries
- LS&S met only 11% of essential specifications in the Staff category.

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Especially concerning is the failure to provide for the Latino community. Some areas in Escondido have 38% linguistic isolation (limited English speaking households) and are comprised of 87% Latino families. Escondido residents, overall, are 51% Hispanic. Our library should certainly include quality programs and materials to serve this important and valued part of our community. But, it is clear that LS&S is not the group with the sensitivity or skill to serve them.

Despite the assessment's documented concerns regarding library operation by LS&S, the Escondido City Council majority, consisting of Mayor Sam Abed and Councilmembers Ed Gallo and John Masson, continues to press forward to execute a contract with this same LS&S to operate our library. Hundreds of concerned citizens have attended and spoken out at meetings of the library trustees and at city council meetings, emails and letters of concern have been sent to city officials, and a petition with over 3000 signatures in opposition to contracting with LS&S has been submitted. Abed, Gallo, and Masson have been deaf to appeals to keep library operation in the community and not outsource it to an out-of-state operation.

In addition to concerns about accountability and transparency, this report confirms that LS&S libraries struggle to provide a competent staff that is sensitive to the local constituents. Outsourcing organizations, like LS&S, contract based on minimum service level agreements (like hours of operation), but the contracts fail to govern overall quality of service and proficiency of staff. When these same minimum service levels were found to be insufficient in Jackson County, predictably LS&S said that the additional expenses were outside the scope of the agreement and charged more (called "additional overhead"). Like all for-profit organizations, LS&S looked for ways to increase their fees by charging more for what they determined to be outside the contract.

Last, LS&S appears to suffer from significant turnover in its own leadership. Reports are that LS&S has had four CEO/Presidents and three CFO's over six years. The Council should be advised that this can be signs of a company struggling to satisfy its private equity owners and remain in business.

Coalition organizer Laura Hunter summed it up, "Knowing what we now know about Library Systems and Services, outsourcing our library to them would not only be a mistake, it would be a scandal."

Link to Report and Excerpts

The complete *Jackson County Library Services Performance Review and Quality Assessment* can be found here: <https://wp.me/p8veb5-zp> Here are just a few excerpts from the report (emphasis added):

- "The absence of a written service plan, staffing plan, technology plan, a contemporary collection development and management plan, and the existence of many dated operational policies, is concerning. **Why is this when LS&S has been operating the Library for 10 years?**" Page 6.
- "Based on interviews of Board members, it seems that **the Board is unlikely to continue contracting out library services in the long term.**" Page 7.

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- “The Board’s confidence that the money is being well spent is **limited by the lack of LS&S transparency.**” Page 5.
- “Latinos make up 12.4% of the population of Jackson County.” “Based on the calendar of upcoming programs, there are **no storytimes in Spanish** (there is outreach to Spanish-speaking childcare). The system offers a Book Club in the Bag collection, but only English titles are offered. There are definite **holes in the Spanish-language collection.** Spanish language materials written or produced by people from Latino cultures are needed. **The slim collection of Spanish-language materials, combined with the lack of programming targeting Spanish speakers or recent immigrants, and the lack of a Spanish-language website, gives the overall impression that Spanish speakers are not considered part of the community nor welcome at the Library.**” Page 6.
- Statement on whether the library staff meets the desired outcomes set for Oregon’s citizens: “The comparatively **low number of librarians**, in addition to other comparative factors, influenced our “no” rating, despite a “yes” rating given by Library Management.” Page 8
- “The Board could pay more money to LS&S and specify staffing levels and compensation, but **the Board still would not know the true staffing costs and would likely pay additional overhead.**” P.23
- “LS&S should be able to provide in its monthly report to the Board who has had training and the nature of the training.” Page 24.
- “The management team believes that the essential standards have all been met, **but they have not.**” and “There is no collection management plan and funds cannot be spent or the collection regularly evaluated according to a collection management plan if there is no such plan. A selection policy which the Library has is not a collection management plan. There is a Legacy materials selection policy. This policy is based upon goals established in 1979. **The collection does not adequately reflect the diverse interests of the community.**” Page 25.
- “One would think that LS&S would be able to negotiate economical volume contracts with OverDrive, Hoopla! etc., as well as subscription databases.” Page 30.
- “Board input suggests that the programming may not align with the strategic plan focuses.” “The programs seem not to be the product of thoughtful consideration of the Strategic Plan, formed to support specific and quantifiable deliverables attached to Strategic Plan goals and measures.” P. 34.
- “**Technology expertise among staff is generally low**, there is not much opportunity for staff to receive formal technology training, and the ability to help patrons with technology and database is inconsistent between locations.” Page 35

Keep updated about this issue by joining us at SaveEscondidoLibrary@gmail.com.

About Save Our Escondido Library Coalition: *The coalition formed by local Escondido community groups and residents in response to the City of Escondido’s move to outsource the Escondido Public Library. The coalition seeks to educate themselves and the public and to provide a conduit for Escondido residents to voice their concerns.*