



## TABOR Issue Brief

The Taxpayer’s Bill of Rights (TABOR) restricts the amount of revenue that can be spent on state and local services—from health care to transportation to education. In the 1990s, TABOR forced reductions in many state services, and since 2000 the revenue situation has become especially dire. TABOR’s ratchet effect won’t let services recover, even when the economy rebounds, so the cuts caused by revenue shortages remain in place. Services will never be able to catch up or keep pace with real economic growth—and will, in fact, continue to shrink—unless we change TABOR’s spending limits and eliminate the ratchet effect.

According to Legislative Council’s Dec. 2004 forecast, under current revenue projections, the General Assembly will have to reduce FY 2005-06 expenditures by \$244.9 million to accommodate allowable General Fund growth as prescribed by TABOR, while simultaneously giving back \$459.2 million in refunds. Colorado’s improving revenue environment means that programs supported by either General Fund or cash funds will compete against each other under TABOR spending restrictions.

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## Public Libraries

- More than two-thirds of Coloradans have a public library card, and it shows. Colorado public libraries circulate over 39 million books per year. But budget cuts have made it impossible for the state’s 115 public library districts to provide a full range of educational and informational services.
- Libraries across the state are being forced to cut public service hours and staffing at a time when Coloradans use libraries in huge numbers—more than 22.6 million visits in 2000. Since June 2002, state funding for libraries has been cut more than 79%.
- Since 2000, the number of students enrolled in Colorado public schools, and thus relying on school libraries for information, has risen considerably, but school library budgets are down almost 10%.
- Statewide the pupil/teacher ratio is almost 17 to 1; the pupil/librarian ratio is over 710 to 1.
- Half of Colorado school library books are more than 15 years old.
- In Colorado elementary schools where teachers and librarians collaborate most, CSAP scores average about 20% higher than in schools without such collaboration and resource sharing.
- In 2002, the Colorado Resource Center (CRC) program was eliminated after more than 30 years of operation. The program enabled the Denver Public Library to freely lend books to other libraries in the state, offer free walk-in service to all Colorado residents, and provide free reference services across the state.

## TABOR ISSUE BRIEF: PUBLIC LIBRARIES

**...We will be reducing hours of operation, buying fewer materials, reducing staff travel, laying off paid employees and anything else we can think of to meet our budget limitations. For the only library servicing the public in this county, the cuts will have a negative impact. We are the only source of public access computers, copiers, Internet, etc. in the community...**

**East Cheyenne County Library District, 2003**

- In 2003, funding for Colorado's Talking Book Library was eliminated. This library provides Braille reading services for sight and reading impaired persons in Colorado and was one of the original national libraries created by the federal government in 1931. The Governor has allocated \$50,000 of discretionary money to purchase new materials but the library's actual maintenance and utilities expenses have gone unfunded. The library lends out nearly 2,000 Braille and books on tape a week.
- In 2003, funding for the State Grant Program fell nearly \$2 million. The program was established in 2001 to help Colorado's small rural libraries, many with book budgets of only a few hundred dollars or less, to buy more books or to subscribe to electronic databases for K-12 students and home-based businesses.
- The nationally acclaimed state library ranking system, the HAPLR Index, ranked Colorado 9<sup>th</sup> in the nation in 2004, down from 5<sup>th</sup> in 2003. Denver Public Library remained the 3<sup>rd</sup> best of the largest libraries in the nation, having fallen from the number one position which it had held for the last three years. Douglas County public library was the 7<sup>th</sup> best in its population class having fallen from 3<sup>rd</sup> best a year earlier.
- The Denver Public Library loaned more than 9 million items in 2004, a 10% drop from the previous year. More than 439,000 residents of Denver have a library card, approximately 77% of Denver's population. The total hours Denver branch libraries are open has declined 15% since 2003. Many libraries, including the downtown flagship library, are now closed one or more days of the week.
- In the fall of 2003, a survey commissioned by the Colorado Association of Libraries measured the extent of local budget cuts to libraries across Colorado. This survey found that cuts to local library budgets in the state had totaled over \$11 million since July 2002. The report indicated that 43% of public library jurisdictions reported a total of over \$6.5 million in cuts. These libraries serve roughly two-thirds of the state population. There was an additional \$4.5 million in cuts to school, college and university libraries.

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(SOURCES: Colorado State Library Research Service ([http://www.lrs.org/asp\\_school/stats\\_2003.asp](http://www.lrs.org/asp_school/stats_2003.asp)); Denver Public Library; Colorado Resource Center (<http://www.denver.lib.co.us/crc/>); and the Colorado Association of Libraries ([www.calwebs.org/cuts.doc](http://www.calwebs.org/cuts.doc)); Henman's American Public Library Rankings (<http://www.haplr-index.com/>)).