



House Finance Committee
Sub. HB 49
Ohio Library Council
April 27, 2017

Good morning, Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Ryan, and members of the House Finance Committee.

My name is Kim Fender and I am the Eva Jane Romaine Coombe Director of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County and Chair of the Ohio Library Council's Government Relations Committee.

I am testifying today on behalf of the Ohio Library Council, Ohio's 251 public libraries and the 8.7 million Ohio library cardholders we serve. This is not only a great honor but also a tremendous responsibility.

The Public Library Fund (PLF) or Library and Local Government Support Fund as it was known until 2008, has been a primary source of funding for Ohio's public libraries since 1985. The PLF is not a line-item appropriation like the numerous programs and state agencies before you in Sub. HB 49. The PLF is in permanent law and is a set percentage of the state GRF. It ebbs and flows each month depending on state revenues. The PLF is currently set at 1.7% of the GRF for FY 2017. In 2008, the PLF was 2.22%.

I have been a Library Director since 1999. In 2000, my library received the highest level of state funding we ever received. That year we appropriated \$80 million. In addition to our general operating fund we had funding for building maintenance and repair, construction of a replacement branch, and \$4.6 million for technology. Our circulation was 13.3 million.

By comparison, in 2017 we appropriated \$59 million. Our appropriation for technology is \$600,000 and we have no funding for new construction and minimal funding for building maintenance. Our circulation in 2016 was 21.2 million.

So, from 2000 to 2017 we saw a 59% increase in items borrowed, a 26% reduction in library funding (even though we added a local property tax) we deferred \$18 million in building repairs, reduced our hours of operation by 10%, and reduced our staffing by 20%.

At this point we can no longer meet the demand for our services with the funding we have, much less with reduced funding. Our subscription to Hoopla is fully accessed each day as early as 9:30 am. The 50 Treehouse licenses we made available April 18 are all in use and we have a waiting list of more than 100. We didn't even promote this new service – just put it on our website and have already taken it off again. Our branches need \$54 million in repairs and improvements – like handicapped accessibility. Three of our locations are completely inaccessible to individuals with mobility impairment and two others have only limited accessibility.

When libraries switched to the PLF in 1985, we understood that, as a percent of state revenue, our funding would ebb and flow with state revenue. But, when you reduce the percent of the PLF at a time when revenue is also declining, or remove a tax from the GRF and replace it with a fee outside of the GRF, libraries take a double or even triple cut.

Although several members of the General Assembly submitted amendments to keep the PLF at 1.7% the bill before you reduces it to 1.66%. We want to thank everyone who supported public libraries with these amendments.

Thank you also to Rep. Anielski who is sponsoring an additional amendment for the Omnibus to reset the PLF at 1.68% and minimize the cut. We would greatly appreciate your support of this amendment.

Ohio's public libraries are a great public service and a great value returning more than \$5.00 in economic benefit for every dollar spent.

As you have heard from my colleagues, now is not the time to make additional cuts to public libraries. During an economic downturn and in the middle of an opioid crisis, public libraries can help to be part of the solution. We urge you to invest wisely by investing in public libraries.

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.