



Senate Finance – Higher Education Subcommittee

Kim Fender

Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County

May 16, 2017

Good morning, Chairman Gardner, Vice Chair Williams, and members of the Senate Finance - Higher Education Subcommittee.

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 included in the State budget. The PLF is in permanent law and is a set percentage of the state General Revenue Fund (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 of \$60 million 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 (digital movies, music, eBooks and more) is fully accessed each day as early as 9:30 am. The 50 Treehouse licenses (online advanced technology education courses in coding, web design and app creation) 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.

Our Library, like many others across Ohio, proactively develops new services to meet the needs of our communities. My Library has collaborated with our OhioMeansJobs Center to offer workshops to jobseekers. Since the workshops began last September more than 250 individuals received assistance with resume writing, interviewing and job search skills. A separate program called Breaking Barriers reached 120 individuals with criminal records with information on how to overcome employment barriers. We plan to follow up with participants to determine whether or not the workshops were effective.

We are also working with CincinnatiWorks, a local nonprofit providing career coaching, to expand their service to the Hamilton Avenue corridor. While CincinnatiWorks would provide the staffing, we would provide the office space, computers and children's activities so that single working mothers could receive career counseling to improve their earning potential.

As Michelle mentioned, a recent study by the Ohio State University found that 23% of Ohio's unemployed did not have Internet access at home and referenced public libraries as a place providing this invaluable resource for jobseekers. Statewide, Ohioans utilized the more than 13,400 computers available in public libraries more than 19 million times. In addition, statewide Wi-Fi use in public libraries was more than 10 million sessions. My library saw combined computer and Wi-Fi use of 2.1 million.

In Hamilton County we are also dealing with the opioid crisis. Just last Friday a man collapsed from a drug overdose on the sidewalk outside our Main Library. Regrettably, this was not the first overdose we have seen at our Main Library and it certainly won't

be the last. We're working with the Cincinnati Police Department to develop solutions that will reduce and ultimately eliminate drug overdoses at the Library.

I'm sure you're all aware of the important work public libraries are doing every day. The challenge is how to pay for these services.

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.

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.

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.