Ohio Senate Finance Committee

House Bill 166 Testimony

May 22, 2019

Good morning, Chairman Dolan, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Nickel Bushong and I am here to testify on House Bill (HB) 166, the biennial budget bill for FY20-21 and public libraries. With me today are my husband, Rev. Bryan Bushong, and daughters Ruby and Vivian.

We live in Perry County and the Perry County District Library is our local library system.

I had to pry Ruby's nose out of a book to get her here this morning. You see, my kids love books. They have both graduated from the 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten program sponsored by our local library. I was initially drawn in by the research – that being regularly read to at home during the preschool years has been shown to be a predictor of later academic success. My kids were drawn in by the prizes – our local library presented them with simple but meaningful prizes for each 100 books completed, and were celebrated at a graduation ceremony upon completion of all 1,000. As I reported to Mrs. Fran DeWine during her recent visit to Perry County, and as I am proud to report to you now, this program is one of the efforts paying large dividends in my children's education. Ruby, at age 8 and going into 3rd grade, is reading at a 5-6th grade reading level. Vivian, at age 4 and going into her second year of preschool, is already reading at around a kindergarten reading level.

In our family, education begins at our local library. My kids have both visited the library with me starting when they were tiny infants, trying to chew on simple board books (their favorites are by Sandra Boynton, in case you were wondering). We've explored picture books, at first following my “reading finger” across the text, and then slowly starting to use their own finger as they painstakingly sounded out words and found important details hidden by illustrators. But, the library is so much more than books! We've checked out DVD's that teach the basics of sign language and ballet. We've used the library's digital resources to borrow e-books and audio books while we were vacationing. We've downloaded free MP3 music to enjoy. My girls love to use the A.W.E. Stations at every library visit – these are computers loaded with a variety of educational games and interactive reading activities. We've used “Playaways” - small digital devices containing videos or audio books – to keep busy during meetings at our church. My children love Miss Dawn and the Storytime program, where they listen to books, listen to poems, and make a craft to remember the day. We have attended programs at our local library where my children had opportunities to touch both a shark and a penguin, and to ask their burning questions to the zookeepers who care for those animals. I am constantly on the lookout for the next engaging resource to draw my children into a love for learning. And because of our local library, I have access to those resources.

Looking back at all of the books, DVDs, magazines, digital resources, playaways, and special programming, as well as all of the other resources I've mentioned, I would estimate that we've used close to $10,000 of library resources in the last year. These are resources that I could never afford to purchase for my family, and these are resources that we share with our community. I am certainly not the only parent that relies on the local library resources as well as the all-important and precious librarians that help us to navigate them all.

It is not only my children who benefit from our local library. I have also relied heavily on library resources for everything from parenting guidance, to learning sewing and gardening skills, to researching health issues, to cookbooks to find healthy and delicious recipes for my family. I have borrowed literature that has grown my own mind, that has sparked deep conversations with friends, as well as memoirs that have affected my humanity and my spirituality. You see, in our family education doesn't just start at the local library – it is also where it continues and thrives throughout our lifetimes. And our family is not the only one to believe and live this way.

I have used library resources to not only enrich my own family, but also our community. When I have volunteered at the local elementary school's summer reading program, I'm sure that you can all guess by now where I go to borrow armfuls of exciting and engaging books to share with elementary school students. You know where I council folks to go for internet access for job and housing searches. You know where I have suggested a lonely senior citizen to go to get engaged with a book club.

The public library system is a vital part of our lives. The first public library in the world was founded in America; free access to information regardless of income or status is an American ideal, and the library is where this freedom is kept alive. When libraries lose funding, our families lose. It means fewer resources for me to supplement my children's educations. It means loss of access to tools that I've used to manage chronic health problems. It means limited hours for working families to visit and make use of resources that public funds have already purchased. It means loss of bookmobile stops for rural communities like mine, where transportation costs are cost-prohibitive for so many of my neighbors, and where there is an utter lack of access to broadband internet service. The expertise and guidance of a librarian cannot be replaced by a Google search. This funding is critical.

In our community in Perry County, the library is an important and valued resource. Along with public schools and public universities, our public library system is one of the profoundly great things about our country. They use financial resources in a shrewd way, yet provide an explosive return on investment. I have deep concerns about seeing this powerful institution financially hamstrung. Please invest in families and communities all over our state. It is imperative to restore the state funding for Ohio's public libraries and set the Public Library Fund at 1.7%.

Thank you for your time and consideration.