

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. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on House Bill (HB) 166, the biennial budget bill for FY20-21.

My name is Babette Wofter and I am the director of the Licking County Library. I am here today to share a few examples of how my library and other public libraries across Ohio are serving our 8.4 million library cardholders.

As an example, my library serves a county population of just over 121,000 Ohioans. In 2018, we circulated over 1.4 million digital and physical items to the library’s patrons. Our computers were utilized over 65,000 times and our Wi-Fi was used nearly 37,000 times.

It is an honor to be here today to share a few examples of how our library is serving our community and the important role state funding plays in delivering those services.

When I started working in a public library over 30 years ago, we were helping children find books for a book report using the card catalog, using a microfiche reader to create our book orders and the most innovative items we circulated were LP records and 16mm films. The library was a very quiet and reserved place.

TODAY, it is bustling with activity and joyful noise. It is a community hub, where folks still come together to learn but they do so in a variety of ways. Babies and toddlers are learning sign language during story time. Children, struggling to read out loud are comforted and excel when given the opportunity to read to a therapy dog in the library. We have free after-school snacks for kids in partnership with our local food pantry. We serve over 60 free lunches a day in the summer to our youth. You can check out musical instruments, have your taxes prepared for free, check out a sewing machine or even find the old card catalog has been repurposed. It now holds a variety of seed packets that you can simply take home, plant and grow your own vegetables. We go out of our buildings and bring the library to you. Storytime is hosted in the local coffee shop. The bookmobile is on site and issuing library cards during opening day at the baseball fields. We sit with local veterans, hear their stories and compile them into a database, honoring them for their service and creating a very special legacy project. Technology trainers are on hand to teach basic computer classes such as how to set-up an email account and how to “Google”.

As for the joyful noise, a few years ago, we started circulating musical instruments, first guitars and then ukuleles. A group of senior citizens formed a ukulele club and practice together every Tuesday at our downtown location. I can hear them singing and playing in the meeting room just down the hall from my office. I have heard everything from *Beautiful Dreamer* to *God Bless America*. It is definitely a joyful noise.

To highlight just a few other examples, I would like to share with you three successful programs/services at our library that focus on Technology, Small Business Assistance and Literacy.

**A Technology Based Initiative: Circulating Mobile Wi-Fi Hot Spots.**

To better serve our community, especially those that do not have access to the Internet or are limited by strict data plans, we began lending mobile hot spots last fall. This small device lets you take the Internet with you anywhere you go. If you don’t have access at home or want to take it on vacation, you can check it out for free with your library card for 28 days and have unlimited access.

We selected the service provider that had the broadest coverage in our area and purchased 24 kits. Each kit cost the library $150 and includes the device, cord, and packaging. The library pays a monthly service fee of $10 for each device.

**Small Business Assistance: Farmers Markets and Social Media Training**

Just over a year ago, we were approached by a representative from our local SCORE chapter. SCORE is a non-profit that provides free mentoring services to established and prospective business owners. They often use our small meeting rooms to meet with their clients. The Canal Market District, our local farmers market, had a group of vendors who wanted to learn more about how Facebook could enhance the marketing of their business and draw more customers. Our Technology Trainer was happy to oblige and presented a workshop on Facebook using our laptop lab. The following is an excerpt from the letter we received from the secretary of the East Central Ohio SCORE Chapter: ‘The venue, equipment and professional guidance could not have been better. We are fortunate to have you and the library available to help educate and enlighten members of our community.”

**Literacy: Summer Reading Programs, a Public Library Tradition**

The third example I would like to share is a tradition in public libraries, one that enhances literacy and even more importantly helps our fellow educators by diminishing the “Summer Slide”. The annual Summer Reading Program is a way for all students to stay engaged and learning throughout the summer. Reading is celebrated, incentives are available, special performers and activities of all kinds are available for free at your local public library. This summer’s theme “A Universe of Stories” not only celebrates reading but will have a focus on space and the 50th anniversary of the moon landing. By keeping children actively learning during the coming months, educators will not have to back track so much when the kids come back this fall. Children are less likely to suffer the “summer slide” when they participate in the summer reading program at their local public library.

**Conclusion**

The mission of our library is to serve our community of lifelong learners. We do this through a variety of educational experiences that touch the lives of our residents from age 0 to 101. Public Libraries have evolved from a quiet, reserved institution of learning to a bustling community hub of

educational activity and joyful noise.

Ohio’s Libraries are known as some of the best in the nation. Yet it is difficult to compare other state’s libraries to our own based on a different organizational structure. In many other states, you must be a local taxpayer or pay a fee for service to use the library. These libraries are funded locally through county or city government. In Ohio, libraries are separate political subdivisions with separate boards and separate budgets. Because we are separate and because of our state funding, Ohioans can go anywhere in the state and utilize public library service for free.

Our state funding through the Public Library Fund (PLF) makes up approximately 55% of our library’s revenue. Without this support, the library would not even resemble the robust community centerpiece that it is today. In 2018, PLF dollars made up less than one percent of the state’s total expenditures. The return on your investment is approximately $5 for every $1 spent. I encourage you to restore state funding for Ohio’s public libraries and set the PLF at 1.7% of the GRF in your version of the budget bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.