

House Finance Committee

House Bill 110 Testimony

March 10, 2021

Good morning, Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and members of the House Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on House Bill (HB) 110 on behalf of Ohio's public libraries.

My name is Debbie Saunders and I am the Library Director of the Gallia County District Library, also known as the Dr. Samuel L. Bossard Memorial Library. The Library is located in southeastern Ohio, along the banks of the Ohio River, on the Ohio/West Virginia border. The Library serves as the county district library of Gallia County, which has an estimated population of 29,898 (2019 census). According to the statistics from the U.S. Census, the median household income in Gallia County is \$44,858 (2019 dollars). Gallia County is located in the heart of Appalachia, two hours from the nearest major metropolitan area.

Having been employed with the library for 30 years, I have witnessed public libraries evolve into dynamic community centers. Many of you have visited one or more of the original Carnegie Library buildings. A common inscription above the doorway of many of these beautiful structures clearly states why public libraries are unique – they are **open to all**. Libraries provide access to opportunities that many would not experience otherwise.

In fulfilling Bossard Library's mission to provide access to information and educational resources, the Library Board and administration believe it is important for internet access to be available in every household.

In March 2017, to help meet this need, the Library launched "Wi-Fi To Go", a mobile wireless hotspot lending program. Each kit contains a mobile hotspot with unlimited data, wall charger, USB cord, and instruction guide, all packaged in a branded carrying case, for ease of transport. By circulating these devices, we are providing patrons with the opportunity to "borrow the internet" to use at home, in their small business, or while traveling within the United States. Patrons use this hotspot, along with their own personal device such as a smart phone, tablet, laptop, or desktop computer to gain internet access.

These hotspots kits are loaned to good-standing library patrons ages 18 and older with the use of their library card. The loan period is two weeks. A single hotspot can provide internet access for up to 15 devices. The Library contracts with AT&T for the actual hotspot itself. These branded cases and monthly data charges are paid through the Library budget.

The demand for these hotspots has been great since the launch of the program.

We began with twenty hotspots in inventory. Due to the consistently high demand we have experienced since the launch of the program, the Library now has 200 mobile hotspots in

inventory with a current average of 90 people on the waiting list for a hotspot. In the last twelve months, the Library's mobile hotspots have circulated over 2,400 times! The Wi-Fi To Go program benefits those who have no internet access in the home, as well as those who are fortunate to have internet access, but have a limited data plan.

On the program's launch date, one of the first borrowers represented a homeschooling family, who was grateful to have the hotspot to use, after citing how expensive it is to purchase data. During the pandemic, the hotspots have proved to be especially needed. An elderly library patron, considered "at-risk" during the pandemic, was advised not to leave his residence for his doctor appointments, but instead to participate in tele-health appointments. Our library was able to provide a hotspot to this at-risk library patron so his health care provider could conduct his "visits" virtually, from the safe comfort of his home. A mother of a high school student recently contacted me and asked how to be placed on the waiting list for a hotspot, due to her son having to sit in the truck at a local church parking lot (with Wi-Fi) to do his schoolwork, since they did not have internet access in the home. She was overjoyed to learn that the Library could provide a hotspot so that her son could do his work from home during this pandemic. A local resident enrolled as a cadet in the Ohio State Highway Patrol Academy found himself in need of a hotspot when, due to the pandemic, the cadets were sent back home from the Academy for a period of time. The Patrol Academy's coursework continued remotely, requiring this cadet to have internet access, which our library was able to provide. This cadet went on to graduate successfully from the 167th Academy Class.

Public libraries are continuous learning centers, providing opportunities for lifelong learning. Libraries provide many online resources to patrons that are only accessible to those with internet access. A popular educational service that our Library has provided since March of 2015 is *Gale Courses for Public Libraries*, which deliver hundreds of engaging, instructor-led online courses focused on professional development, technology skills, and personal enrichment to transform lives and foster positive changes in our community. Gale Courses are tied to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' fastest-growing occupations, thereby aiding in workforce development. Since our library began offering Gale Courses, there have been 1,582 enrollments with our patrons logging over 18,000 hours of class time in various courses.

One of the largest employers in our county, Holzer Health Systems, has benefitted greatly from the Library's *Gale Courses*, as their employees have taken advantage of the medical coding and medical terminology classes offered by the Library. Gale Courses for Public Libraries are six-week online courses led by college instructors. These courses are accessible through the use of one's library card. Participants receive feedback from the instructor and upon successful completion, are awarded a certificate. Popular courses include Beginning Sign Language; Accounting Fundamentals; Become a Veterinary Assistant; A To Z Grant Writing; and Microsoft Office courses, among hundreds of other useful topics of interest.

Given all of the digital resources the Library provides, you may be wondering how these programs are of benefit to those who lack digital literacy: the knowledge, skills, and behaviors used in a broad range of digital devices.

For those patrons, Bossard Library offers our Tech Tutor program. Patrons schedule a tech tutor session with a member of the Library staff who will sit down one-on-one to teach:

- Basic use of computers.
- Basic assistance setting up and using an e-mail account.
- Searching the Internet.
- Basic use of Microsoft Office products
- Basic assistance with social media sites
- Utilizing Apple, Android or Kindle devices.
- Accessing and using the Library's online resources such as Ancestry Library Edition, Auto Repair Reference Center, Gallia County Newspaper Digital Archives, Lynda.com, Gale Courses, and many more.

The overarching theme of my testimony to you today centers on the public library as the community center – the hub of access to informational resources.

We believe in providing unique opportunities to those we serve in our rural area. Many of you have probably had the pleasure of accompanying your child, grandchild, niece, or nephew to destinations such as Build-a-Bear® Workshop. Both geographic and economic barriers prevent many children in our county from having this amazing experience of selecting, stuffing, & naming a new little stuffed animal friend to love.

Therefore, the Library sponsored our own “Create a Critter” Workshop for area families, with over 900 in attendance. Words cannot adequately express the joy that the library staff felt in helping families make this memory at the Library. Children were able to select their new animal friend, stuff it, select a name for it and cuddle with their new furry friend during our special story time and parade.

Community members respond very favorably to a wide-variety of library programs, as they are limited in terms of affordable, positive entertainment venues during evening hours, on weekends, and when children are on break from school.

In 2016, Bossard Library introduced our Book-a-Bike program, a unique cultural opportunity that enables library card holders to borrow a bicycle for riding in town, particularly from the Library to the local bike/hike path. Prior to this program’s launch, Gallia County residents did not have the opportunity to rent a bike in Gallipolis.

The primary goal of the Book-a-Bike program is to provide cultural opportunism, with the goal of seeing families coming together to share quality time while enjoying a bike ride as they explore the great outdoors, particularly along Gallia County’s *Rails to Trails* eight-mile bike path.

A second goal of the Book-a-Bike program is to provide opportunities for the public to be

educated on: 1) the importance of regular exercise for a healthy mind and body; 2) the importance of bicycle safety; and 3) how to ride a bicycle.

Again, as the community center of Gallia County, we believe in providing unique educational and cultural opportunities to those we serve, that many would not experience otherwise, due to geographic and economic barriers.

As I shared with the House Finance Committee in a previous year's testimony, our library became the first library in the world to host the widely-renowned *Bodies Revealed* exhibition, in the fall of 2016. At over 5,000 square feet, the *Bodies Revealed* exhibition provided visitors an unparalleled chance to explore, experience, and celebrate the wonder of the human form. In the three months that this exhibition was at the Gallia County Library, 19,555 visitors came to see *Bodies Revealed*. Visitors came from at least 34 different states including Kentucky, Indiana, and North Carolina, as well as from 59 of Ohio's 88 counties. At least 6,500 of these visitors were students ranging from middle school age up through the post-secondary level.

In 2019, the Library hosted the exhibition titled *Space: A Journey to Our Future*, presented in collaboration with NASA. This exhibit has been displayed at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. Visitors to this exhibition had the opportunity to touch actual rocks from the lunar surface and the red planet; explore a future Lunar Base Camp while walking through a full-size space habitat and workpod; take a spin on a centrifuge that visitors power like a bicycle; all the while getting an up-close look at a wide range of artifacts from the space program. Total attendance for this exhibition was 10,760 over the four-month run at the Library.

In our rural area, the vast majority of residents would never have the opportunity to see exhibitions of this caliber if not for the Library bringing them to the community. Hosting these exhibitions is just one of the many ways the library promotes lifelong learning as we provide these cultural experiences to our community.

The importance of the services that public libraries provide has been magnified during the pandemic. Our library closed for several weeks in order to make necessary adaptations to the library building and in library operations in response to COVID-19. During these weeks, we offered patrons who did not have a library card with the opportunity to apply online for a digital library card, enabling access to ebooks, movies, music, audiobooks, and more. We soon began offering curbside service, which is still offered today, before opening our doors again on June 1.

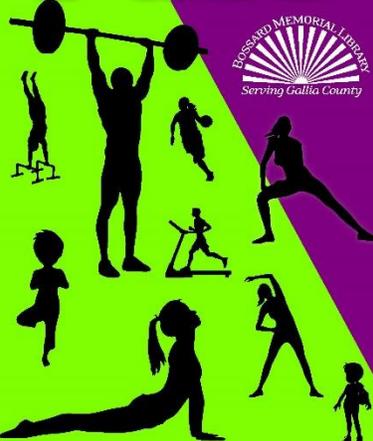
The Library now offers children's virtual story time and pat-a-cake lapsit, as well as "take and make" craft kits for both adults and children. Despite the pandemic, the Library launched our Fit and Fun Gym Pass Program, enabling patrons to borrow a monthly pass to one of four area gyms. The Library also began our Puzzles for Patients program, which provides a word-search or crossword puzzle book and pre-sharpened pencil to each local hospital patient, providing a comforting way to pass time when visitors may be limited.

From bridging the technological gap through our Wi-Fi to Go program to providing enriching, educational opportunities for all ages, the State's Public Library Fund enables our Library to provide these unique, much-needed services. I extend my appreciation for your support of Ohio's public libraries and request that public libraries be made a priority in this biennium

budget, with the PLF being maintained at the current rate of 1.7%. Having stability in the library budget allows library boards and administrators the flexibility to plan for sustainable library programs and services that are needed by those we serve.

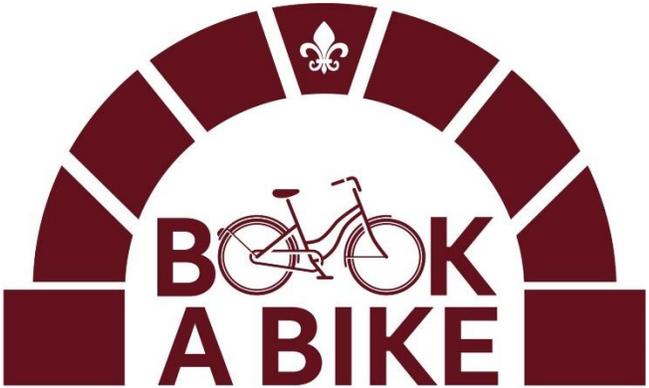
Thank you for your continued support of Ohio's public libraries - unique community centers that are "open to all."

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MOBILE HOTSPOT LENDING

