



Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Chairman Matt Dolan
Vice Chair Theresa Gavarone
Ranking Member Vernon Sykes

Wednesday May 19, 2021
House Bill 110 (Oelslager) of the 134th General Assembly

Interested Party Testimony Provided by:
Tracy Strobel, Executive Director, Cuyahoga County Public Library

Good Morning Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Finance Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of Cuyahoga County Public Library (CCPL) regarding the Public Library Fund (PLF).

My name is Tracy Strobel, and I am Executive Director of Cuyahoga County Public Library, which I am proud to say has been recognized as the nation's top large public library system for the past 11 years. CCPL serves about 615,000 residents across 47 communities with 27 branches throughout Cuyahoga County and a service point at MetroHealth hospital. The PLF represents about 25% of Cuyahoga County Public Library's operating budget, and it is essential to maintaining the critical community information resources and literacy services that CCPL provides.

I am concerned because Substitute House Bill 110 reduces the PLF from 1.7% to 1.66% of the General Revenue Fund (GRF). For the two largest library systems in Greater Cleveland, this amounts to a \$2.1 million loss - statewide, that figure is closer to \$22 million. I respectfully request that the Senate supports maintaining the Public Library Fund (PLF) at 1.7% of the General Revenue Fund (GRF) in the FY22-23 biennium budget and holds public libraries harmless from any unintended consequences that may result from tax reform.

This is not the time to decrease the Public Library Fund. As Ohioans come out of the COVID-19 pandemic, their needs around workforce development, support for K-12 students, and long-term solutions to the digital divide are only set to grow. Our public libraries are well positioned to support the job seekers, students, families, and seniors whose lives have been most impacted by the pandemic. In fact, over the past year, Ohio's libraries stepped up to deliver services that filled critical community needs, including:

- Maintaining WiFi access through the lockdown so that students could log in to remote classrooms – sometimes from the library parking lot.
- Establishing virtual job coaching sessions so the newly unemployed could begin effective job searches.
- Partnering with the Ohio Department of Health and local public health agencies to support vaccinations. CCPL hosted FEMA canvassers from Cleveland's mass vaccination clinic and helped more than 1,400 residents from marginalized populations register for the vaccine.

As we look ahead to this summer, our library system is partnering with local school districts to help students catch up after a year of interrupted learning. Every CCPL branch will have free tutors available this summer to work one-on-one with students who need a little extra help getting back on track before the next school year.



As Ohio’s public libraries have worked – and will continue to work – to support our communities, we do not stand to benefit from the federal funding that will be directed to local governments. The only library-dedicated funding Ohio will receive is approximately \$4.5 million from the Institute for Museum and Library Service, which will be divided among the hundreds of Ohio university libraries, K-12 school libraries, prison libraries, and public libraries through competitive grants. This would not come close to covering the losses we will suffer if the PLF is reduced.

Public libraries maintain widespread public trust and support. As we have spent the past year “social distancing” to keep one another safe, we must now turn to places like public libraries to help rebuild that important social infrastructure that keeps neighbors, families and communities connected to one another. As you discuss Sub HB 110 please consider how the cut in funding would impact public libraries and the communities that rely on them.

I urge this committee to support maintaining the Public Library Fund at 1.7 percent of the General Revenue Fund.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Tracy Strobel
Executive Director
Cuyahoga County Public Library