



**House Finance Committee  
House Bill 96 Testimony  
March 11, 2025**

Chairman Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill (HB) 96 on behalf of Ohio's public libraries.

My name is Michelle Francis, and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Library Council. The Ohio Library Council is the statewide association representing Ohio's 251 public library systems (rural, urban, and suburban) and the 7.4 million library cardholders they serve.

With me today for testimony are:

- Jay Smith, Director of Government Relations and Legal Services at OLC
- Diane Cunningham Redden, Trustee, Cincinnati & Hamilton County Public Library
- Anastasia Diamond-Ortiz, Chief Executive Officer/Director, Lorain Public Library System
- Chris May, Director, Mansfield/Richland County Public Library
- Jason Kucsma, Executive Director/Fiscal Officer, Toledo Lucas County Public Library
- Stacey Church, Director, Norwalk Public Library
- Cheryl Kuonen, Executive Director, Mentor Public Library
- Sandi Thompson, Director, Puskarich Public Library

In the interest of time, only Jay and I will be presenting the testimony, but we will all be available for questions. We are here to share our thoughts on HB 96, the Public Library Fund (PLF) and to share information with you about the critical services provided to Ohioans throughout the state by their local public libraries.

**\$27 Million Loss in State Funding**

We would like to begin by thanking Governor DeWine for making public libraries a priority in his executive budget proposal by changing the PLF percentage to 1.75% of the General Revenue Fund (GRF) tax receipts. In 2024, Ohio's public libraries experienced a \$27 million loss in state funding through the PLF as compared to 2023 (see attachment A). This resulted in libraries being funded at the same level they were 25 years ago. At the local level, this is having an extreme impact when the demand for library services is expanding, usage is increasing, and the rising cost of inflation can no longer be absorbed or ignored. In 2023, Ohioans visited their local libraries more than 44.6 million times (see attachment B). That is the equivalent of 434 sold-out buckeye football games at Ohio Stadium (102,780 capacity). As a local example, one single library branch in Cincinnati saw a 165% increase in usage last year.

Furthermore, libraries are doing and buying things today that they were not buying 25 years ago – namely ebooks and audiobooks. According to OverDrive (an Ohio based company that is a global digital distributor of ebooks and audiobooks) even though Ohio ranks 7<sup>th</sup> by population size, we are 2<sup>nd</sup> in the nation for digital library usage with approximately 40 million public library checkouts in 2024. That is a 90% increase in digital book usage in the past 5 years (see attachment C). For the Puskarich Public Library, a library system in Harrison County, they saw the costs of their digital book usage double last year alone. Keeping up with the growing demand for services is only possible with adequate funding.

The Public Library Fund is not a line-item appropriation like the numerous programs and state agencies before you in HB 96. It is in permanent law and is a set percentage of the state's monthly tax receipts that go into the GRF. It is currently set at 1.7% and the Governor's Executive Budget for FY 26-27 proposes changing the percentage to 1.75%. Considering the loss in state funding libraries already experienced last year, we believe this is a strong step in the right direction. We are respectfully asking the Ohio House to restore the Public Library Fund.

### **Libraries in Ohio are Separate Political Subdivisions**

State funding through the PLF is critically important because it remains a primary source of revenue for libraries. Overall, more than 51% of the total funding for Ohio's public libraries comes from the state through the PLF. In addition, 19% of our public library systems (48 of 251) do not have a local property tax levy and rely solely on their state funding as their main source of revenue for day-to-day operations.

As a reminder, our libraries are separate political subdivisions which means we are extremely unique in comparison to libraries in other states. In other states, public libraries are a division under city or county government, so they are not responsible for certain expenses. Unlike other states, in Ohio we are responsible for maintenance of our own buildings. This means our members are continuously dealing with expensive repairs to roofs, elevators, flooring, boilers, HVAC systems and security systems. Furthermore, we have our own fiscal officers, human resources staff, and our own IT.

As separate political subdivisions in Ohio, we are more like our local government partners, but we do not have taxing authority, and we do not benefit from:

- County Sales Tax
- City Income Tax
- Casino Revenue
- Funding for Facilities in the Capital Budget
- ARPA Funds
- Inside Millage

Therefore, our reliance on the PLF is even greater than our partners who benefit from the Local Government Fund (LGF).

Based on state and national data, we know that Ohio's public libraries are extremely popular and in high demand with some of the highest usage in the nation. Libraries are open to all and a resource that Ohio's citizens increasingly turn to for vital services. Our success is dependent on the strong partnership between the State and the local library systems.

### **Science of Reading**

Literacy and education are at the heart of what we do as public libraries. We agree with Governor DeWine and Director Dackin that reading is simply the key to everything. It's the key to success in school and it's the key to success in life. Last year we partnered with the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (ODEW) to provide training for our libraries on the Science of Reading. Our libraries support students, parents and their communities by providing homework help centers, high dosage tutoring (Lorain Public Library System), lending early childhood literacy and Science of Reading kits to families (Mentor Public Library), and providing information to parents on the Science of Reading (Mentor and Cincinnati).

In addition, we are strong supporters of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Ohio as many of our public libraries, their Friends groups and their Foundations have taken over local affiliate responsibilities to support the program. As public libraries, we know the importance of early childhood literacy and laying the foundation for future success. Our members have both sponsored and promoted this program at the local level and we continue to support its efforts.

### **Collection Development Policies**

Every public library system is a reflection of the community it serves and, in some cases, different branches within a single system may offer different services and programs based on the needs of their local neighborhood. When it comes to the books on the shelves or materials in the collection, Ohio's public libraries are open to all and serve everyone. They strive to have something for everyone. Therefore, each system has a collection development policy and a process in place for purchasing materials. With that comes a process for feedback and input from the local community through various means.

Libraries provide access to information, but it is up to the individual library patron and customer to determine what they choose to read. It is important to note that public libraries do not act "in loco parentis," which means we do not act in the place of the parent or guardian. Parents and guardians play a vital role in determining what their children are reading and have a right to determine what is best for their child.

### **Library Services & Helping Ohioans Save Money**

Public library services are essential to the communities we serve. Our members will always have books on the shelves, but our services today go far beyond books. We meet patrons where they are – if they are at home, at school or outside of our buildings. Libraries today provide a wide range of services and partner with various state agencies to not only deliver services at the local level, but to save taxpayers, families and businesses money as well. Below are just a few examples:

- America 250-Ohio – Local public libraries across the state are partnering with our friends at the state level to celebrate America’s 250<sup>th</sup> Birthday. They are sponsoring and hosting various free local events including “Ohio Goes to the Movies” to celebrate Ohio related films.
- Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) – We are partnering with DODD to highlight services and programs in public libraries for disabled patrons such as Next Chapter Book Clubs, Sensory Storytime, pen readers, sensory kits/bags, adaptive equipment and toys, universal changing tables, noise canceling headphones, large print keyboards, American Sign Language classes, wheelchair charging stations, and home delivery are just a few. In addition, about \$1.27 million is deducted from the Public Library Fund each fiscal year to pay for the Library for the Blind and Print Disabled.
- Broadband Ohio – Public libraries have been providing internet access to Ohioans through their buildings for 29 years. Since 2020, we have partnered with Broadband Ohio to support the state’s overall plan for broadband expansion to ensure all Ohioans have access to connectivity. In addition to computers for personal, employment and student use, libraries provide computer training (Mentor Public Library) and Tech Tutor one-on-one appointments (Norwalk Public Library). Many lend Wi-Fi hotspots which are extremely popular with families (Mansfield/Richland County Public Library).
- Small Business & Nonprofit Services – Public libraries provide multiple services to help small businesses, nonprofits and entrepreneurs. Everything from classes on grant writing and MakerSpace equipment to research services and training. In 2024, the Toledo Lucas County Public Library Small Business and Nonprofit Services Team provided more than \$3.1 million in value to entrepreneurs and businesses through:
  - Training and Education Value: \$404,802
  - Research Services Value: \$2,407,106
  - Physical Space Value: \$83,814
  - Technology and Equipment: \$234,482
- Food Pantries and Distribution – Ohio is known for having the most public library locations serving Summer and Afterschool Meals. Many have food pantries as well, based on the needs of their local community. Libraries serve meals to young people (97,242 in Cincinnati) as well as seniors (1,120 at a single Cincinnati Branch). Some have expanded their food literacy programs to cooking classes, gardening classes and seed libraries.
- Tax Services – Public libraries partner with other local organizations to provide free tax assistance and forms. In 2024, the Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library helped 1,200 patrons file taxes and saved them \$300,000 in filing fees. This resulted in just over \$1 million in refunds.
- Museum Passes – Numerous public libraries across the state lend museum/activity passes to everything from zoos, art museums and science centers to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. This is extremely popular with families and provides savings to taxpayers.
- Services for Seniors – Medicare 101 and Social Security 101 Classes, Memory Kits, Memory Cafes, Caregiver Support Groups and Dementia Friends Workshops are just a small snapshot and doesn’t even begin to cover the full array of services and programs

for seniors at Ohio's public libraries. One of our library patrons recently celebrated her 105<sup>th</sup> birthday with her public library in NE Ohio.

### **Conclusion**

Ohio is a local control state, and every library delivers services at the local level based on the needs of their individual community. In your local communities, we serve as a critical resource for young people, students, families, adults, seniors, entrepreneurs and small businesses. We educate, connect, and provide lifelong learning opportunities for success. Some have said that we serve cradle to grave or birth to death. None of this would be possible without our state funding through the PLF. That funding was reduced last year by \$27 million.

We are urging the Ohio House to make public libraries and the services we provide to 7.4 million Ohioans a priority in this budget by restoring the PLF.

There are still several unknowns regarding Ohio's economy and the budget process between now and June 30 that could impact the state's GRF base (indirectly reducing the PLF). We are respectfully asking the Ohio House to restore the PLF to 2% of the total GRF. This will help to ensure services at the local level can continue if additional changes are made to the budget that would indirectly reduce the PLF.

The Ohio Library Council and Ohio's public libraries look forward to working with you as you work your way through the budget process.









## Restore Funding for Ohio's Public Libraries

- Public libraries have already been cut.
- Ohio's public libraries are receiving the same funding now as they did 25 years ago.
- In 2008, the General Assembly established the Public Library Fund (PLF) at 2.22% of the state's General Revenue Fund (GRF). Since that time, the percentage has been reduced. The PLF is currently set at 1.7%.
- The cut in state funding is severely impacting the PLF at a time when costs are escalating, patron usage is increasing, and the demand for local services is growing and expanding.
- 51% of the total funding for Ohio's public libraries comes from the state through the PLF.
- The primary sources of revenue for public libraries are state funding and/or local property tax levies.
- 19% of Ohio's public library systems rely solely on state funding through the PLF and do not have a local property tax levy (48 of the 251 library systems).
- Public libraries in Ohio have not been able to keep up with the rate of inflation. Since 2007, inflation has risen by 51.6%, meaning the \$458 million allocated to the PLF in FY07 should have reached \$694.5 million by FY24 to maintain the same value.
- Ohio's public libraries are extremely popular, with over 7.4 million cardholders and one of the highest library usage rates in the nation.
- Public libraries deliver a significant return on investment, generating \$5 in economic value to Ohioans for every \$1 spent.

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### Public libraries differ from schools and other local government entities in several ways:

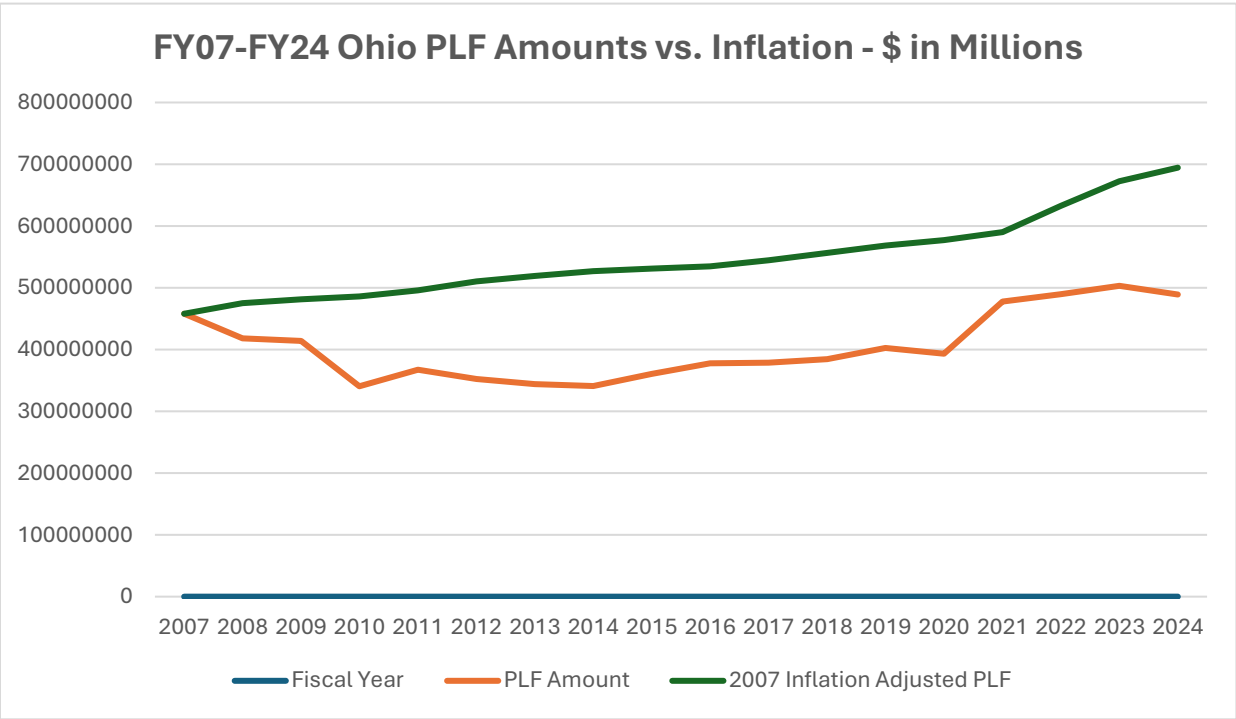
-  **No County Sales Tax**
  -  **No City Income Tax**
  -  **No Casino Revenue**
  -  **No Funding for Facilities in Capital Budget**
  -  **No ARPA Funds**
  -  **No Inside Millage**
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**In 2024, public libraries experienced a \$26.8 million cut.**

| Year | Calendar Year (CY) | PLF Loss         | Fiscal Year (FY) | PLF Loss          |
|------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 2022 | \$502.38 Million   |                  | \$489.85         |                   |
| 2023 | \$510.18 Million   |                  | \$503.22         |                   |
| 2024 | \$483.3 Million    | - \$26.8 Million | \$489.34         | - \$13.88 Million |

Back in the year 2000, public libraries received \$484.1 million.

**Funding for Ohio’s public libraries significantly lags inflation.**



**It’s time to restore state funding for Ohio’s public libraries.**

- **Ohio’s public libraries have already been cut.**
- **Restore the Public Library Fund (PLF) to 2%.**
- **Prioritize public libraries in the state budget.**



**Ohio Public Library visits  
in one year were equal to**

**434**

**Sold-Out Buckeye  
Football games**

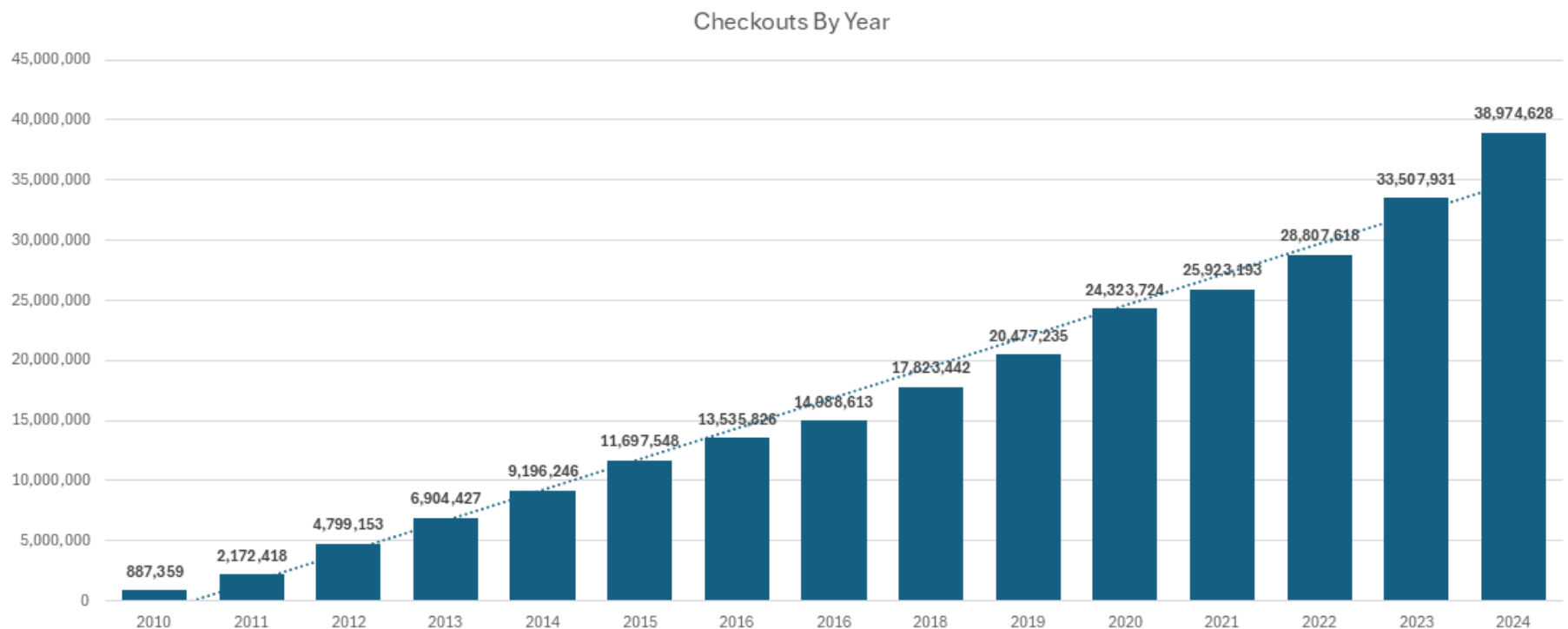
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Ohio Stadium capacity: 102,780





# State of Ohio: Digital Book Library Circulation by Year



Source: OverDrive, Inc. (worldwide digital distributor of ebooks and audiobooks)