

Opponent Testimony for Ohio H. B. 96

House Finance Committee

April 7, 2025

Christina Dendy, Constituent

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Christina Dendy Gaspar. I am a concerned constituent of Mr. Young's district. I am a patron of our libraries, a parent, an educational author/curriculum developer and a children's book author, and a substitute librarian, paraprofessional and teacher (as able, because our district suffers a perpetual shortage of them), a community volunteer, a poll worker, and a voter.

Our public libraries are integral parts of our communities. They are essential repositories of knowledge and ideas as well as critical nexuses for educational support, employment aid, civic engagement and assistance, and so much more. They are the workplace of local heroes who provide so many important services to our neighbors and our visitors. They build connections. They tie together people, businesses, and institutions within communities and across communities in the state. Some may argue that libraries are exceeding their intended purposes, or mandates, but I would counter that exceeding expectations is a good thing. In the instance of libraries, they fill significant gaps and needs in our communities, and even many of their critics would miss those services were they to disappear.

I moved to Dayton, Ohio, 20 years ago. I never expected to move to Ohio, much less remain here for 20 years. It's now the longest I have lived anywhere. It's where I have raised three children, two still in our public schools. Three things I have touted to people since moving here are the library systems, the parks systems, and the museums. They have each made a crucial difference in our lives for two decades now, and I know that many people can say the same. Libraries are the ultimate expression of our founding principles--democracy, equal opportunity, and the freedoms of speech, the press, religion, and assembly. They benefit everyone, without partisanship, across every demographic distinction. They are so significant to the advancement of our society, of any civilization, that Andrew Carnegie, a man with whom I staunchly disagree on many points, financed more than 2,500 libraries here and around the world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. More than 1,600 of those libraries were in this country, at a cost of more than \$60 million to his private fortune. But it's up to us, to our local, state, and federal governments, to keep these and other libraries going. Carnegie would not have become Carnegie without a businessman named Colonel John Anderson opening his personal library to his local community of working boys. Carnegie later wrote, "A library outranks any other one thing a community can do to benefit its people. It is a never failing spring in the desert." Carnegie recognized the value of libraries, and so should we.

Please protect our state library system. They are an indisputable state resource and treasure. I think our libraries and schools could benefit from more state funding, but at the very least, please do not endorse further cuts. Please restore the Public Library Fund to 1.75%, the amount in Governor DeWine's proposed budget. Be the leaders we need. Be leaders our children can admire—and thank.

Thank you for your time and attention,

C. Dendy Gaspar