

“Lifelong learner”...I first heard that phrase when after teaching high school English for 25 years in four different Ohio public schools, I decided to go back to Kent State and get my Master of Library Science degree. And WHAT a year of learning! More than anything, that year taught me how libraries had morphed into an eclectic mix of technology, print and online materials, and valuable partnerships connecting to every facet of our Ohio communities.

I am speaking here today to reinforce the importance of keeping the current funding for the Ohio Public Library Fund (PLF) to allow this vital tradition of having the best library services in the country.

I have lived in Perry, Holmes, Wayne, Hancock, and Tuscarawas counties throughout my 36-year teaching career, and I can attest to the importance of libraries throughout those counties. From gathering print materials for my English 10 students at the Licking County Public Library (Newark) to checking out 16 mm films from the Wayne County Public Library (Wooster) for my Hiland Humanities class to monthly meetings for our Tuscarawas County Sports Hall of Fame Board of Trustees at the Dover Public Library...the significant contributions of these institutions to our schools, businesses, organizations, and community members (YOUR constituents) cannot be minimized.

In 2024 the Dover Public Library had over 118,000 visitors to their main building including the Senior Center Branch Library. Over 299,000 items were checked out with 821 different programs being offered. Over 500 children signed up for the library’s Summer Reading Program in partnership with Dover City Schools. The bustling Book Cellar with over 5,000 volumes provides budget-priced books and AV items for sale to the public and is manned by Friends of the Library (501 C non-profit) volunteers.

The PLF provides over \$788,000 or 60.6% of the Dover Public Library’s current funding. If this funding is reduced to the amounts proposed by House Bill 96, the Dover Public Library will need to make drastic cuts in services, staff, and building upkeep and maintenance in the coming years. But cutting funding ALSO limits community engagement involving Ohio citizens.

Jim Gill, Director of the Dover Public Library for 16 years, has stated that "In the public library, it doesn't matter what your last name is, how much money you have or don't have, what church you go to, or what kind of person you were in high school. EVERYONE is treated fairly and access and use of the library is completely free." This access and fair treatment is what has made Ohio public libraries the BEST in the country (for now).

As a school library media specialist for New Philadelphia City School District from 2000-2011, I was also selected to serve as a Board member of INFOhio. This Board through the Ohio Education Network and the Information Technology Centers provides library automation and technical support to Ohio's Pre-K-12 schools and provides vetted free digital resources for all Ohio Pre-K-12 students, their parents, and educators. These resources were important components of my library lessons for fostering critical thinking skills in research and accurate assessment of information. When students can take this skill-set and apply it to college research at Kent University or the Ohio State University (OHIOlink), or complete a job application correctly, or learn the importance of responsibilities required in using AI, what an advantage for our students, our parents, our educators...all who live and work in Ohio.

In March 2025 Governor DeWine gave his State of the State address (and I quote) ..."For the truth is, we cannot achieve our full potential as a state unless each Ohioan first achieves theirs." How can EVERY Ohioan (not just some) reach their full potential? How can you facilitate Ohio's lifelong learners and provide the necessary tools in advancing the achievement of our citizens?

I, as a parent and grandparent, an educator, a librarian, an Ohio senior citizen and a citizen of the world, ask that you vote to keep the Ohio Public Library Fund at its current set percentage of the General Revenue Fund.

Any questions? Thank you for listening!