



Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 96 with regard to the educational support and services that rural libraries such as mine are providing in our Ohio communities.

My name is Beth Freeman, and I am the Director of the New Carlisle Public Library in western Clark County. We are about to enter our 92nd year of service, and I could not be prouder of the partnerships that we have forged with our local schools, businesses, other libraries, and individuals to give our community the support that it needs. Since our incorporation in June of 1933 was as an independent library, we were classified as an Association Library in the 1960's and deemed eligible to receive funding from the Library and Local Government Support Fund (LLGSF), which later transitioned to receiving our funding from the Public Library Fund (PLF) in the 1980's. After partnering with our local school district, we were able to pass a levy in 2018 that brings in approximately \$80,000 annually, but that only comprises about 10% of our annual budget. The remaining 90% of our budget comes from the PLF. The New Carlisle Library would not exist, and all of the wonderful things I'm about to share with you would not happen, without the historically successful partnership between libraries and the state government.

The largest benefit of PLF funding, for all Ohioans, is the lack of geographical gatekeeping. According to the 2020 census, the population of New Carlisle is 5,559 individuals. As of April 30, 2025, my library has over 7,700 registered cardholders. This does not mean that every person in our city has one library card, and half of them have two; it means that we are providing services and support to any teachers, parents, students, and community members who are residents of Ohio and walk through our front doors. We serve patrons from Springfield, Saint Paris, Medway, and even those from Miami County to the west and Champaign County to the north. Under any funding mechanism that ties library funding to other political subdivisions, I would be required to turn away these patrons, who may not have access or transportation available to another library, or whose alternative library may not be meeting their needs as well as we can.

The second benefit of the PLF, that is particularly felt by our small, rural library, is the availability of inter-library cooperation. The New Carlisle Library is small but mighty, and one of the ways we increase the collections our patrons can access is our participation in the Serving Every Ohioan consortium. It relieves our purchasers from the responsibility of trying to provide everything for everyone within our one building, and allows us to purchase those materials that will be of most interest to our patrons while still giving us a way to borrow materials purchased by other libraries we partner with. This cooperation extends to our digital offerings as well, through our participation in the Ohio Digital Library. If Ohio's libraries become segregated and expected to compete for patrons, these cooperative efforts would be eliminated and would decrease access for all Ohioans.

The availability of cooperative access means that we can provide more services and support for our community. The New Carlisle Library partners with Tecumseh Local Schools, private preschools, and homeschool parents and co-ops in a variety of ways, supporting teachers, parents, students, and paraprofessionals. This starts with making sure that our babies and toddlers are exposed to as many words and stories as possible. We hold StoryTimes for various ages and at various times, allowing parents to choose the time that works best for their families. New Carlisle has an annual per capita income that is \$14,000 below Ohio's average (\$25,000 versus \$39,000) and a poverty rate of 20.5% compared to the state average of 13.3%, and food insecurity is an issue for many of our families. We have begun offering a dinner storytime, where all family members are able to have a good meal provided by a local restaurant, and hear an entertaining story one evening a month. The library is spearheading a 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten program, both within the library and at local daycares and preschools, encouraging all caregivers to support children's future literacy. All of these efforts allow the New Carlisle Library to bridge the gap and try to ensure that our children are as prepared as possible for a successful Kindergarten start and school career.

Whether a student is in traditional public school, receiving a private education, or enrolled in a digital or homeschool environment, the New Carlisle Library is here to support them. We provide free printing services for teachers and students, circulate wifi hotspots for patrons without reliable internet access, and break down as many barriers to access as possible. Our Youth staff has been trained in the Ohio State University's "Sit Together and Read" program, learning a new approach to reading aloud that actually helps the child learn to read independently. Teachers and parents who need books for curriculum projects will utilize our interlibrary loan services to either get many copies of one book, or a variety of books across one subject. With parental approval, the New Carlisle Library provides a digital library card for every incoming student in 6th and 9th grades at Tecumseh Local Schools, allowing teachers to assign readings or supplemental materials without being obligated to purchase them. This also allows students with learning disabilities to access digital audiobooks that can be read concurrently as an accommodation.

As we all know, a complete education includes socialization and cooperation in addition to classroom learning. The New Carlisle Library has a very popular LEGO club, which includes both traditional and homeschool students who partner to learn STEM concepts and cooperation. There is a monthly craft class led by one of our homeschool students, furthering her leadership, planning, and problem solving skills while providing other children with activity and entertainment. Our Homeschool Book Club meets monthly, with every student giving an oral book report on what they have read recently. This hones their public speaking skills as well as exposing them to books they might not pick up on their own. We support an environment that allows younger students to learn from older ones, and provides older students leadership opportunities.

The beautiful thing about independent public libraries is that our services are allowed to be as individual as each patron. Parents guide their children, within our doors and resources, to help support their own individual needs. Continuing statewide library funding through the PLF as a percentage of the General Revenue Fund allows us the ability to plan for the future while also delivering what our students need today. Ohio libraries are special, the New Carlisle Library is special, and financial cuts and unsecure future funding would irrevocably damage the potential our students are realizing in our community.

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