

## Testimony in Opposition to the Public Library Portion of Amended House Bill No. 96

To Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee:

On May 6, State Librarian Amanda Knapp testified before the Senate Education Committee. Several of the questions had more to do with public libraries generally rather than the State Library. As a former director of a small library in Massachusetts, now head of Right to Read Ohio, I would like to address those questions.

Libraries have long been known for loaning books. Maybe it would surprise you to know that libraries have also offered things such as art, artifacts, classes, and lectures well before state legislatures allowed for taxes to be collected to create public libraries.<sup>i</sup> If you think of libraries as only offering nonfiction and fiction, it is somewhat limiting, but when you think of them as offering information and ideas, many more resources come to mind. Librarians respond to the informational needs in their communities, and often create public spaces for the public to express itself as it likes, be it Makerspaces for entrepreneurs or chair yoga for seniors. Libraries are the institutions of the right of free speech, which includes receiving speech through reading, observing, listening, and collaborating<sup>ii</sup>. Librarians facilitate knowledge creation<sup>iii</sup>.

Why do Ohio libraries get more state funds than other states? Because Ohio set it up that way, in order to give every Ohioan access to a great library. Sadly, the legislature has been whittling away at that formula in the name of local control. Here are the current House proposed budget numbers, which are lower than funding in 2001 even before inflation:

Governor's proposal	\$531.7M in 2026	\$549.1M in 2027
House proposal	\$485M in 2026	\$495M in 2027
Calendar year 2001	\$496M in 2001 <sup>iv</sup>	

You asked about how many public libraries do not have local levies to offset their state budgets. There are 48 Ohio Public libraries with no levies, largely because their rural populations cannot afford them. I am attaching a list at the end of this testimony. They include libraries in the districts of Senators Brenner, Cutrona, and Huffman from the Education Committee. I hope you are motivated to help your constituents continue to access robust public libraries. I encourage you to visit them and ask about their services. I would also recommend two films for you, available now on PBS: "Free for All: The Public Library" and "Library Stories: Books on the Backroads," both of which explain how libraries of all sizes strive to meet community needs and interests.

There is one other subject I feel must be addressed, and that is the mandate on page 2274 of the House Bill 96 budget proposal:

Sec. 3375.47. A public library created under Chapter 3375. of the Revised Code shall place material related to sexual orientation or gender identity or expression in a portion of the public library that is not primarily open to the view of persons under the age of eighteen<sup>v</sup>.

This mandate would force local libraries to move or remove any mention of LGBTQ+ people, any gender expression such as boys “acting like boys,” and many child and teen biographies, literary fiction, romance, history, and age-appropriate sex education. In Idaho, a similar law forced at least one library to close to children, as it could not isolate its adult collection away from the children’s section<sup>vi</sup>. In North Dakota, the governor rightly vetoed a similar bill<sup>vii</sup>. This mandate would be very costly, forcing librarians to sift through their collections to find these books and perhaps remove taxpayer-funded books. It is also hurtful, telling certain minority communities that they should not be read about. It is also unconstitutional, having already been adjudicated in *Sund v. Wichita Falls* in the year 2000<sup>viii</sup>, when two children’s books about kids with gay parents were relegated to the adult section of the library.

Libraries give a great return on taxpayer investment, delivering \$4.00 of value for every tax dollar spent<sup>ix</sup>; but just as when your offices help a person who has been denied vital care, it isn’t only about the numbers of people served, but of the priceless value given. Libraries provide lifelong education, and sometimes, they change lives. Let all people read.

Please restore funding for public libraries to the Governor’s proposal of 1.75%, and remove the mandate to move or remove certain books for minors.

Sincerely,

Sharon Hawkes, MLIS

Right to Read Ohio

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<sup>i</sup> Wendorf, Richard, ed. (2007). *America’s Membership Libraries*. Oak Knoll Press, Delaware.

<sup>ii</sup> United Nations. Article 19, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” Retrieved 5/8/25 from <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

<sup>iii</sup> Lankes, R. David (2012). *Expect More: Demanding Better Libraries for Today’s Complex World*.” pp. 48ff. Retrieved 5/8/25 at <https://davidlankes.org/rdlankes/Publications/Books/ExpectMore/ExpectMore2.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Ohio Library Council (2023). “History of State Funding for Ohio’s Public Libraries.” Retrieved 5/8/25 from [https://www.olc.org/assets/pdf/History+of+Funding+01.01.25/#:~:text=LIBRARY%20GROWTH,grew%20from%20\\$284%2C700%2C000%20to%20\\$496%2C458%2C342](https://www.olc.org/assets/pdf/History+of+Funding+01.01.25/#:~:text=LIBRARY%20GROWTH,grew%20from%20$284%2C700%2C000%20to%20$496%2C458%2C342).

<sup>v</sup> Representative Stewart, et al (2025). Am. Sub H. B. 96. Retrieved 5/8/25 from [https://search-prod.lis.state.oh.us/api/v2/general\\_assembly\\_136/legislation/hb96/02\\_PH/pdf/](https://search-prod.lis.state.oh.us/api/v2/general_assembly_136/legislation/hb96/02_PH/pdf/)

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<sup>vi</sup> Big Country News Connection (2024). "Officials Say Small Idaho Library Is Forced to Close to Children." Retrieved 5/8/25 from [https://www.bigcountrynewsconnection.com/idaho/officials-say-small-idaho-library-is-forced-to-close-to-children/article\\_e47b6adc-16b0-11ef-93cc-07099b4fbce7.html](https://www.bigcountrynewsconnection.com/idaho/officials-say-small-idaho-library-is-forced-to-close-to-children/article_e47b6adc-16b0-11ef-93cc-07099b4fbce7.html)

<sup>vii</sup> CBS News (April 25, 2025). "North Dakota's GOP Governor Vetoes Library Restrictions, School Voucher Program." Retrieved 5/8/25 from <https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/north-dakota-governor-library-restrictions-veto/>

<sup>viii</sup> Sund. V. City of Wichita Falls, TX (2000). Retrieved 5/8/25 from <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp2/121/530/2505416/>

<sup>ix</sup> Howard Fleet & Associates (2001). "Return on Investment from Ohio Public Libraries and Comparison with Other States." Retrieved 5/8/25 from <https://growthzonecmsprodeastus.azureedge.net/sites/2039/2024/09/Exec-Summary-Ohio-Library-ROI-and-State-Comparison-08.09.21.pdf>

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**NON-LEVY LIBRARIES AND SENATORS, 2025**

1 ALEXANDRIA PUBLIC LIBRARY, LICKING	TIM SCHAFFER (R)
2 ALGER PUBLIC LIBRARY, HARDIN	ROB MCCOLLEY (R)
3 AUGLAIZE COUNTY DISTRICT PUBLIC LIBRARY, AUGLAIZE	SUSAN MANCHESTER (R)
4 BELLAIRE PUBLIC LIBRARY, BELMONT	BRIAN CHAVEZ (R)
5 BELLE CENTER FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY, LOGAN	SUSAN MANCHESTER (R)
6 BLISS MEMORIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY, SENECA	BILL REINEKE (R)
7 BOWERSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY, HARRISON	BRIAN CHAVEZ (R)
8 BRADFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY, MIAMI	STEPHEN HUFFMAN (R)
9 BRIGGS LAWRENCE COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY, LAWRENCE	SHANE WILKIN (R)
10 CALDWELL PUBLIC LIBRARY, NOBLE	BRIAN CHAVEZ (R)
11 CARNEGIE PUBLIC LIBRARY - WASHINGTON COURT HOUSE, FAYETTE	SHANE WILKIN (R)
12 CARROLL COUNTY DISTRICT LIBRARY, CARROLL	AL CUTRONA (R)
13 CENTERBURG PUBLIC LIBRARY, KNOX	ANDREW BRENNER (R)
14 CLAYMONT SCHOOL DISTRICT PUBLIC LIBRARY, TUSCARAWAS	AL LANDIS (R)
15 COLUMBIANA PUBLIC LIBRARY, COLUMBIANA	AL CUTRONA (R)
16 LEETONIA COMMUNITY PUBLIC LIBRARY, COLUMBIANA	AL CUTRONA (R)
17 CRESTLINE PUBLIC LIBRARY, CRAWFORD	BILL REINEKE (R)
18 EAST PALESTINE MEMORIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY, COLUMBIANA	AL CUTRONA (R)
19 FORT RECOVERY PUBLIC LIBRARY, MERCER	SUSAN MANCHESTER (R)
20 GALION PUBLIC LIBRARY ASSOCIATION, CRAWFORD	BILL REINEKE (R)
21 GERMANTOWN PUBLIC LIBRARY, MONTGOMERY	WILLIS BLACKSHEAR, JR (D)
22 HERBERT WESCOAT MEMORIAL LIBRARY, VINTON	SHANE WILKIN (R)
23 HIGHLAND COUNTY DISTRICT LIBRARY, HIGHLAND	SHANE WILKIN (R)
24 HOLMES COUNTY DISTRICT PUBLIC LIBRARY, HOLMES	AL LANDIS (R)
25 HOMER PUBLIC LIBRARY, LICKING	TIM SCHAFFER (R)
26 JACKSON CITY LIBRARY, JACKSON	SHANE WILKIN (R)
27 J.R. CLARKE PUBLIC LIBRARY, MIAMI	STEPHEN HUFFMAN (R)
28 LEPPER LIBRARY, COLUMBIANA	AL CUTRONA (R)
29 LIMA PUBLIC LIBRARY, ALLEN	SUSAN MANCHESTER (R)
30 LOGAN COUNTY DISTRICT LIBRARY, LOGAN	SUSAN MANCHESTER (R)
31 LOGAN-HOCKING COUNTY DISTRICT LIBRARY, HOCKING	SHANE WILKIN (R)
32 MARION PUBLIC LIBRARY, MARION	BILL REINEKE (R)
33 MINERVA PUBLIC LIBRARY, STARK	JANE TIMKEN (R)
34 MARY LOU JOHNSON-HARDIN COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY, HARDIN	ROB MCCOLLEY (R)
35 MONROE COUNTY DISTRICT LIBRARY, MONROE	BRIAN CHAVEZ (R)
36 MONTPELIER PUBLIC LIBRARY, WILLIAMS	ROB MCCOLLEY (R)
37 NEW STRAITSVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY, PERRY	SHANE WILKIN (R)
38 OAK HILL PUBLIC LIBRARY, JACKSON	SHANE WILKIN (R)
39 PENINSULA LIBRARY & HISTORICAL SOCIETY, SUMMIT	KRISTINA ROEGNER (R)
40 PERRY COOK MEMORIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY, MORROW	BILL REINEKE (R)
41 PICKAWAY COUNTY DISTRICT PUBLIC LIBRARY, PICKAWAY	MICHELE REYNOLDS (R)
42 PUTNAM COUNTY DISTRICT LIBRARY, PUTNAM	ROB MCCOLLEY (R)
43 SELOVER PUBLIC LIBRARY, MORROW	BILL REINEKE (R)
44 SHELBY COUNTY LIBRARIES, SHELBY	SUSAN MANCHESTER (R)
45 SYLVESTER MEMORIAL WELLSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY, JACKSON	SHANE WILKIN (R)
46 WAGNALLS MEMORIAL LIBRARY, FAIRFIELD	TIM SCHAFFER (R)
47 WELLSVILLE CARNEGIE PUBLIC LIBRARY, COLUMBIANA	AL CUTRONA (R)
48 WORCH MEMORIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY, DARKE	SUSAN MANCHESTER (R) OR STEPHEN HUFFMAN (R)

ALL: Willis Blackshear, Jr, Andrew Brenner, Brian Chavez, Al Cutrona, Stephen Huffman, Al Landis, Susan Manchester, Rob McColley, Bill Reineke, Michele Reynolds, Kristina Roegner, Tim Schaffer, Jane Timken, Shane Wilkin