

Dear Chair Cirino, Vice-Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for considering my testimony regarding public library funding.

Changes to Gov. DeWine's proposal have been made to Sub. HB 96 (budget bill) that would drastically cut state funding for public libraries. This unprecedented elimination of the Public Library Fund comes at a time when libraries across the state already saw a \$27 million shortfall in state funding in 2024. Ohio's libraries are currently funded at the same level as in the year 2000 with no adjustment for inflation. This sub bill:

- * Reduces state funding for Ohio's public libraries by more than \$100 million over the biennium as compared with Gov. DeWine's proposal.

- * Creates a new distribution formula that would cut funding to public libraries in 39 counties on July 1. There are 93 library systems in these 39 counties, and 20 of them do not have a local levy.

I urge this committee to recommend restoring the Public Library Fund to at least a fixed 1.7%, the current amount of state revenue. Ohio's public libraries depend on funding from the state's Public Library Fund. This fund not only sustains day-to-day operations, but also the books, resources, programs, and services that all Ohioans, from children to seniors, rely on.

It would be hard to overstate how important our libraries are to our communities. For example, my neighbor has low vision, and library services have provided a lifeline for her over the years. Recently, I needed to renew my passport. Our neighborhood library had applications as well as a Q&A corner for folks who had passport questions. Our neighborhood library offers space for after-school tutoring, for community meetings, and even for concerts. I have fond memories of introducing our sons to the joy of books, and I like knowing that those who cannot afford to buy books have access to whole worlds through the public library.

The thought that our legislators would think it wise to cut library funding confounds me - especially when the current version of the budget allocates taxpayer money for private school vouchers at the expense of public schools. And who would rather shortchange libraries in order to help fund a new Browns stadium? If the budget is allowed to stand with the current level of library funding, all Ohioans will be the poorer for it, and I urge you to recognize our libraries for the amazing resource they are for everyone in our state, and compensate them accordingly.

I also have major concerns about restrictions that have been added to the House budget bill requiring public libraries to place material "related to sexual orientation or

gender identity/expression" in a portion of the public library that is not primarily open to the view of persons under the age of 18. As you must already know, many library branches are quite small. If they cannot follow this requirement due to shortage of space, would they be forced to close? Who will decide which books must be hidden away – our legislators? The language in the bill, as written, is so broad that I'm not sure any librarian would know which books would even qualify for such restrictions. And who would enforce the restrictions? Would a "library police" be established? Would one parent's objection be sufficient to shut down a public library?

Why would we mess with one of the best library systems in the country? Please restore library funding to AT LEAST the current level, and remove the vague provision requiring certain materials to be removed from the view of those under age 18.

Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Deborah Cooper