



**Senate Finance Committee
Sub. H.B. 96
Interested Party Testimony
June 5, 2025**

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Senate's proposal for the FY26-FY27 state operating budget.

My name is Michelle Francis, and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Library Council (OLC). Joining me today for testimony is Jay Smith, OLC's Director of Government and Legal Services. The OLC is the statewide association representing Ohio's 251 public library systems (rural, urban, and suburban) and the 7.4 million library cardholders they serve. We appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts on the substitute bill, as it relates to the Public Library Fund (PLF), and the important services provided by Ohio's public libraries.

State funding through the Public Library Fund (PLF) is critically important because it remains a primary source of revenue for Ohio's public libraries. Statewide, more than 51% of the total funding for public libraries comes from the state through the PLF. In addition, 19% of Ohio's public library systems (48 out of 251) do not have a local property tax levy and rely solely on their state funding as their main source of revenue for day-to-day operations.

Our partnership with the state has been in existence for almost 100 years as state funding has been provided to public library systems to deliver services to all Ohioans at the local level. **The Senate's version of the bill would further reduce state funding for Ohio's public libraries by more than \$10 million in each year of the biennium by funding multiple state agencies directly from the Public Library Fund.**

As stated in our previous testimony, Ohio's public libraries already experienced a \$27 million loss in state funding in CY 2024 as compared to CY 2023. This resulted in libraries being funded at the same level they were 25 years ago.

Now is not the time to make additional cuts to libraries when the demand for services at the local level is growing, usage is increasing, and the rising cost of inflation can no longer be absorbed or ignored.

Ohioans love and use their public libraries. In 2024, Ohioans visited their local libraries more than 48 million times. That is the equivalent to 711 sold-out Cleveland Browns football games at Huntington Bank Field (67,431 capacity). We know there has been

lots of discussion about what is really happening in Ohio's public libraries today and the services being provided. Here is just a small snapshot:

- Services for ALL Students (Homeschoolers, Private, Charter and Public)
- Senior Services (Memory Cafes, Memory Kits, Social Security/Medicare)
- Early Childhood Literacy
- Homework Helpers and Tutoring
- Summer Learning Programs
- Workforce Development/Career Coaching
- Classes on Life Skills
- Broadband Connectivity
- Food Assistance

It is important to note that public libraries do not act "in loco parentis" and do not act in the place of a parent or guardian. Parents and guardians play a vital role in what their children are reading and have a right to determine what is best for their child.

This is what is really happening in Ohio's public libraries, and these are the services that will have to be reduced or cut. Libraries cannot absorb any further losses or cuts in state funding.

We are respectfully asking the Ohio Senate to make the following changes in the omnibus amendment:

- Fund the Public Library Fund at the level originally proposed in the Executive Budget: \$531.7 million in FY26; and \$549.1 million in FY27.
- Eliminate the \$10.2 million deduction from the PLF for multiple state agencies. These entities should be funded directly from the GRF.
- Remove the provisions related to library materials. We feel parents know what is best for their children and consider this an unfunded mandate.
- Remove the provision allowing the County Budget Commission to undermine the will of local voters.
- Restore the ability of political subdivisions to propose replacement levies.

We are urging the Ohio Senate to restore the Public Library Fund to Executive Budget levels to ensure key services can be delivered at the local level to Ohio's 7.4 million library cardholders. Thank you for your time. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.