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House Bill 96, Interested Party Testimony
Senate Finance Committee | June 5, 2025

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on HB 96. I am Lauren Hagan, CEO of Columbus Metropolitan Library.

While I echo the concerns you have heard from my colleagues about library funding, I will focus my time on another significant issue: a House-added amendment that would require public libraries “to place material related to sexual orientation or gender identity or expression in a portion of the library that is not primarily open to the view of minors.” This provision raises several issues, ranging from its vague language and constitutionality to its costly implementation, that I believe merit attention.

Ohio’s libraries have robust collection development policies written, reviewed and updated by expert librarians that determine where materials should be shelved. A West Arkansas library was recently sued and lost on 1st Amendment grounds for segregating materials in a similar way to what is proposed in HB 96.¹

This provision also restricts families’ freedom to decide what is appropriate for themselves and their children. To support families with this, we offer kid’s library cards—which allow customers under the age of 18 to check out *only* materials from our kids or teens sections. These cards are not permitted to check out adult materials, movies, video games, e-books or audiobooks. Parents who wish to do so may sign their child up for a “full access” card but can add restrictions on their child’s ability to check out audio visual materials with certain ratings.

The proposed policy is also too vague to provide real guidance to libraries on what is meant to be restricted, which will lead to inconsistent and arbitrary enforcement across Ohio. One small library in Idaho, where a similar measure was passed, was forced to become adults-only out of concern that they could not move regulated materials far enough from their children’s section given their small space.² This issue is one we and many other Ohio libraries would experience should this provision become law.

Finally, implementing these requirements would also be costly, and no additional funds are included in the proposal. Libraries will need to review and reclassify their collection, redesign spaces, retrain staff and possibly purchase new shelving or add new security measures. We estimate the initial cost for compliance at \$3 million with continuing costs of more than \$1.5 million every year. This policy unnecessarily diverts funds from essential programs and services that our community relies on.

As I close, I respectfully urge you to remove this provision from the budget. Ohio’s libraries have long been trusted community resources, committed to providing access to information while upholding the rights of parents and families. This provision would create significant logistical and financial challenges for libraries, while also raising important legal and constitutional questions.

Thank you for your time and support for Ohio’s libraries. I am happy to answer any questions.

¹ <http://arkansasadvocate.com/2025/04/29/crawford-county-library-will-foot-the-bill-for-lawsuit-over-segregation-of-lgbtq-childrens-books/>

² <https://www.boisestatepublicradio.org/politics-government/2024-05-20/donnelly-public-library-idaho-books>

