

HB96 Testimony
Senate Finance Committee
Chauncey Montgomery, Director
June 4, 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 Chauncey Montgomery, and I am the Director of the Community Library in Sunbury, Ohio. The Community Library is in eastern Delaware County, serving a population of around 25,000.

Our country has a strong tradition of placing high value on public libraries. Benjamin Franklin who helped start the first successful lending library in America said, "...libraries have improved the general conversation of the Americans...[and] made the common tradesmen and farmers as intelligent as most gentlemen...". Years later, Andrew Carnegie donated millions to communities across America to fund public libraries, as he saw them as "cradles of democracy." Similarly, the State of Ohio recognized the value of public libraries, and by the early twentieth century, it was providing support for library services.

Ohio's dedication to supporting public libraries has enabled our libraries to become some of the best in the nation. What is more, that State support allowed equality of services whether you lived in a large city or a small, rural community. Libraries across Ohio, regardless of size, provide equal access to resources and programs that strengthen and empower individuals, and I believe have improved the quality of life in the State.

In this most recent biennium budget cycle, support for library services has been threatened by changes to the way the State plans to fund its public libraries. In the current Senate version, funding for Ohio's libraries becomes a line-item appropriation that is \$90.8 million less than the Governor's proposal over the next biennium. Additionally, funding for the State Library of Ohio, the Ohioana Library Association, the Regional Library Systems, the Ohio Public Library Information Network, and the Library for the Blind come from the same appropriation. As such, it is estimated that public libraries will receive an additional \$10 million less annually.



Community Library

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Director/Fiscal Officer

I am gravely concerned that such changes to the Public Library Fund (PLF) will harm our State. Ohioans depend on their local libraries for not only books, but also early childhood literacy, tutoring services, income tax preparation, passport and notary services, copy and fax services, public meeting rooms, and much more. This is especially true for those living in smaller communities or rural areas where the public library is the only source of such services. The PLF accounted for about 40% of our library's annual revenue in 2024. While a reduction in the PLF will certainly affect our services, I cannot imagine how it will impact libraries that depend almost entirely on the PLF for their support.

Public libraries remain valued public institutions. I implore the Ohio Senate to restore the Public Library Fund to Executive Budget levels to ensure all Ohioans have access to quality library services.



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