

Written Testimony to the Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Regarding the FY26–27 State Operating Budget
Submitted by: William Rutger, Director
On behalf of Avon Lake Public Library
Date: June 6, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding the Senate version of the FY26–27 state operating budget and its potential impact on Ohio’s public libraries, including the Avon Lake Public Library.

Public Library Fund (PLF)

We respectfully urge the General Assembly to restore funding to the Public Library Fund (PLF) at the levels proposed in the Governor’s Executive Budget—\$531.7 million in FY26 and \$549.1 million in FY27. The Senate’s current proposal to reduce this to a flat appropriation of \$490 million and \$500 million significantly undercuts the support local libraries need to meet rising demand.

In 2024, Avon Lake Public Library welcomed over 180,000 visitors. These visits reflect not only individual use but also the many ways we partner with and serve the broader Lorain County community. A reduction in funding would directly impact our hours of operation, staffing, and access to essential services, including materials, internet access, job support, early literacy programming, and safe spaces for gathering.

In Avon Lake, as in many other communities across Ohio, the public library is far more than a place to check out books—it is an economic driver, a community destination, and a partner to schools, city departments, and nonprofits. We are a trusted resource and a vital access point for cultural, educational, and informational equity.

We provide meeting and gathering spaces, support small businesses and job seekers with services such as printing, faxing, and internet access, and help bridge digital divides through programming on technology, online safety, and information literacy. From OhioMeansJobs partnerships to Small Business Administration support, from AARP Tax Assistance to Kindergarten Readiness and Connecting for Kids, we host or collaborate with organizations that meet needs beyond the scope of any one agency.

We are home to DiscoveryWorks, a STEM learning space for all ages, an Ozone Garden and a Motus Tower, and we work closely with groups such as the Community Council, Garden Club, and CRS (Community Resource Services). This kind of wide-reaching impact is possible because of stable state support—support that will be jeopardized under the current Senate proposal.

We also urge you to eliminate the \$10.2 million annual deduction from the PLF for entities such as OPLIN, the Library for the Blind, and the Ohioana Library Association. While important, these services should be funded separately from the General Revenue Fund, not at the expense of local libraries’ operations.

Library Materials Provision

The current provision requiring libraries to segregate materials related to sexual orientation or gender identity from the view of minors is vague, overly broad, and unmanageable. We urge you to remove this provision from the final budget.

At Avon Lake Public Library, we already have a clear process in place that allows patrons to request material reviews. In fact, we often receive feedback thanking us for offering a diverse and inclusive collection that reflects our entire community. All people should be able to see themselves and their experiences represented in the materials we provide.

It is also important to note that children must have a parent or guardian's signature to receive a library card, and the parent can cancel that card at any time. We do not act "in loco parentis" — we support families by offering access and choice, and we trust parents to decide what is appropriate for their children. Libraries are not in the business of censorship, but of education, exploration, and access.

County Budget Commission Provision

We also urge the Senate to remove the provision that would allow county budget commissions to reduce millage on voter-approved property tax levies. As a library that receives 75% of its funding from our local property tax levy, we believe this would undermine local control and disenfranchise voters. Ohioans have consistently demonstrated their willingness to invest in their libraries, and they should not have that decision second-guessed or overridden. For libraries that serve areas across multiple counties, this provision would also create confusion, inconsistency, and administrative challenges that threaten financial stability and service continuity.

In Closing

For nearly 100 years, public libraries have worked in partnership with the state to deliver essential local services. The PLF makes up less than 0.5% of Ohio's total state budget, but it is absolutely foundational to our ability to serve effectively and equitably.

On behalf of the Avon Lake Public Library, our city, our schools, and the more than 180,000 individuals who walked through our doors last year, I respectfully urge you to:

- Fund the PLF at levels included in the Executive Budget;
- Eliminate the \$10.2 million annual deduction from the PLF for other state agencies;
- Remove the unfunded and unclear provision related to the segregation of library materials; and
- Strike the County Budget Commission provision to preserve local control and voter authority.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your continued support of Ohio's libraries and the communities we serve.

Sincerely,

William Rutger, Director
Avon Lake Public Library