



**Senate Local Government Committee  
House Bill 309  
Interested Party Testimony  
November 12, 2025**

Chair O'Brien, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the Senate Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written interested party testimony on House Bill 309 on behalf of Ohio's public libraries.

My name is Jay Smith, and I am the Director of Government and Legal Services for the Ohio Library Council (OLC), the OLC is the statewide association representing Ohio's 251 public library systems, which include rural, urban, and suburban libraries, and the 7.4 million library cardholders they serve.

In Ohio, public libraries are separate political subdivisions and are fiscally independent from city and county government. Each library system is governed by a board of trustees that is appointed by their appointing/taxing authority, depending on the type of system. Appointing authorities may include school boards, county commissioners, common pleas judges, city council, and township trustees. However, Ohio libraries are responsible for their own buildings and operations, and as public institutions, they must comply with Ohio's Open Meetings and Sunshine Laws.

Because of this autonomy, the Ohio Revised Code explicitly authorizes a board of library trustees to declare existing funds insufficient for library needs and allows for a process to submit a levy request to the voters in the library's service area. While all Ohio public libraries receive money from the state's Public Library Fund (PLF), the PLF now accounts for less than half of the total funding supporting libraries statewide.

While we originally opposed HB 309 as introduced, we appreciate the improvements to the bill that would offer a five-year safe harbor for new levies. We also encourage further changes to include a two-year safe harbor for renewal levies. These recommendations were made by Governor DeWine's Property Tax Working Group, which concluded at the end of September.

It's also important to note that library boundaries do not always match the boundaries of their taxing authority. More than 43 of Ohio's 251 public library systems have service area and taxing boundaries in more than one county. Some having service area in up to five counties.

Given that public libraries in Ohio are separate political subdivisions and have wide-ranging service areas that often do not directly correlate with their taxing authority, it is

important for County Budget Commissions to hear directly from the taxing unit. Currently, HB 309 specifies that only the taxing authority has the right to appear and present information at a public hearing on behalf of the taxing unit. For example, out of the 251 public library systems in Ohio, 150 of them have school districts as their taxing authority. As the bill is currently written, it would be the various School Boards that would be required to present budgetary details on behalf of the public library to the County Budget Commission.

Ohio is a local control state, and every library delivers services at the local level based on the needs of the local community. In your local communities, we serve as a critical resource for young people, students, families, adults, seniors, entrepreneurs, and small businesses. We educate, connect, and provide lifelong learning opportunities for success. Libraries do this while being good stewards of taxpayer dollars and sharing resources beyond boundaries through joint purchasing; and participating in consortia and pooling programs.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony before the Senate Local Government Committee and look forward to continued collaboration on HB 309.