

## Testimony Before the House Finance Committee

April 17, 2015

INFOhio Executive Director Theresa Fredericka and I, Laura Sponhour, the Outreach Specialist for INFOhio, appreciate this chance to tell you what the \$1.1 million cut to INFOhio in Line Item 200-465, Section 263.150 means to the K-12 community we serve and to the public libraries and university libraries we partner with.

INFOhio is Ohio's PreK-12 Digital Library and an “exemplary shared service,” according to the Ohio Office of Budget and Management. Among other things, INFOhio provides vital digital resources—including hundreds of thousands of magazine and newspaper articles, eBooks, practice tests, lesson plans, educational videos, and more—to **all** PreK-12 schools, public and private, traditional and online. These high-quality, reliable resources that support Ohio’s New Learning Standards are not available for free on the Internet.

What does this \$1.1 million cut mean to PreK-12 students, teachers, and parents?

It means that our most used digital tool, BookFlix, will be eliminated. BookFlix provides eBooks for K-3 classrooms that help our youngest students learn to read. Particularly, BookFlix helps children learn to read smoothly. Reading smoothly—“fluency” is the technical term literacy coaches use—is vital to comprehension.

We began providing access to BookFlix starting in 2013 specifically to support the Ohio Legislature’s Third Grade Reading Guarantee initiative. It’s a tool our schools have come to depend on. This year alone BookFlix has logged more than 8.6 million views, which is a 134% increase in use over last year. And already we’re getting worried calls from teachers asking whether it will be available next year.

What does this \$1.1 million cut mean to our partnership with public and university libraries?

It means that INFOhio will no longer be able to meet its \$500,000 commitment to the Libraries Connect Ohio shared service. In addition to INFOhio, Libraries Connect Ohio includes the Ohio Public Library Information Network (OPLIN), OhioLINK (representing university libraries), and the State Library of Ohio. We pool our funds to take advantage of economies of scale in licensing agreements for digital content, which reduces the cost for all of us. For example, INFOhio—with its \$500,000 investment in this partnership—saves Ohio schools \$85 million per year over what it would cost districts to license these resources independently.

This \$1.1 million dollar cut effectively means that the partnership is dismantled. Student access to digital tools, particularly those they need to prepare for college and for careers, will be greatly reduced. Maybe even eliminated.

In conclusion, we are respectfully but fervently requesting that INFOhio's funding in Section 263.150 be restored to \$2.5 million. Those dollars are crucial to the depth and breadth of resources we offer that narrow the digital divide.

Thank you for your time. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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