



Senate Finance Committee

Kim Fender

June 7, 2017

Good afternoon, Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate Finance Committee.

My name is Kim Fender and I am the Eva Jane Romaine Coombe Director of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County and Chair of the Ohio Library Council's Government Relations Committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify today.

I'm sure you're all aware of the important work public libraries are doing every day. The challenge is how to pay for these services.

When Library funding is reduced at the State level, there are only two options. Libraries may seek additional tax revenue at the local level through a property tax, our only option. This is a lengthy and expensive process that ultimately increases taxes at the local level.

The second possibility is to reduce services. The \$19 million reduction in the Public Library Fund (PLF) for FY18 equals:

380 full time jobs lost  
51,395 hours of library services and operations cut  
974,358 books or 1.9 million eBooks not purchased

Every dollar invested in a public library results in \$5.00 in benefit to the community. This means the \$19 million reduction in the PLF in FY18 really equals a \$95 million reduction in benefits and services to Ohio's citizens and taxpayers.

What's harder to quantify is the loss of services that are badly needed across our State including Kindergarten readiness, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading success, and high school graduation. We also provide services that support GED students and help job seekers find work and develop new skills.

From 2000 to 2017 we saw a 59% increase in items borrowed, a 26% reduction in library funding, deferred \$18 million in building repairs, reduced our hours of operation by 10%, and reduced our staffing by 20%. We also added a local property tax.

At this point we can no longer meet the demand for our services with the funding we have, much less with reduced funding. Our branches need \$54 million in repairs and improvements – like handicapped accessibility.

Each library impacted by the reduction in funding will choose how to address the additional shortfall: either a new or increased local tax or a reduction in library service.

Now is not the time to make additional cuts to the PLF. During an economic downturn and in the middle of an opioid crisis, public libraries can help be part of the solution.

We are respectfully asking the Ohio Senate to not make any additional cuts to the PLF, **maintain the PLF at the current rate of 1.7% of the GRF and ensure that the PLF receives no less than the actual FY 2017 distribution amount.**

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.