



**House State and Local Government Committee
House Bill 325 Proponent Testimony
Jan. 29, 2020**

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill (HB) 325 creating Toni Morrison Day in Ohio.

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 (rural, urban and suburban) and the 8.5 million library cardholders they serve.

We are here today to offer our support in designating February 18th as Toni Morrison Day. Born Chloe Anthony Wofford on Feb. 18, 1931, and raised in Lorain, Ohio, Toni Morrison grew up with a profound love for reading and literature. She also grew up at a time of economic hardship during the great depression and a period full of racial inequalities.

Several past witnesses have documented her biography, but I would like to place a spotlight on the fact that she grew up in a family where storytelling was a common practice. Her inspirations, flourished through literature, were aided by the resources provided by the Lorain Public Library. In fact, growing up, Morrison spent time working as a library aide in the public library.

In 1993, Morrison received the Nobel Prize in Literature, making her the first African American woman to be selected for the award. In 1995, the Lorain Public Library honored Morrison by opening up a special reading room to commemorate her countless accolades and honors. The space offers a supportive reading environment for all patrons. If you are ever in the area, I highly recommend you visit the library and this reading room, which also contains a significant amount of Toni Morrison memorabilia.

Throughout all of Toni Morrison's achievements and literary works, she always carried with her the memories of her hometown. She was quoted in a speech at Oberlin College in 1991 saying "In my work, no matter where it's set – New York, Martinique, wherever – the process, the imaginative process, always starts right here on the lip of Lake Erie."

The Ohio Library Council would like to thank Representative's Miller and Howse for introducing this important legislation and recognizing the impact Toni Morrison has made on Lorain, Ohio, the United States, and the World. I would be more than happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.