



**OHIO HOUSE FINANCE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
CHAIR – THE HONORABLE JON CROSS
H.B. #110
MAIN OPERATING BUDGET: FY2022-23**

**OHIOANA LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
BUDGET TESTIMONY
February 18, 2021**

Written Testimony provided by David Weaver, Executive Director

Chairman Cross, Ranking Member Howse, and members of the committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide this testimony on behalf of the Ohioana Library Association. We are grateful that Governor Mike DeWine, in his “Investing in Ohio’s Future” Executive Budget for FY2022-23, has recommended Ohioana for an allocation of \$305,000 in each year.

Since its founding by Ohio First Lady Martha Kinney Cooper in 1929, Ohioana has represented the model of a successful public/private partnership between the State of Ohio and a not-for-profit organization. Our current First Lady, Fran DeWine, continues in the tradition begun by Mrs. Cooper, serving as Honorary Chair of the Ohioana Board of Trustees, which is comprised of twenty members elected from around the state, and four appointees of the Governor’s.

Through its collection, publications (including the *Ohioana Quarterly*), educational partnerships, and annual events, including the Ohioana Book Festival, Ohioana Awards and the new Ohio Literary Trail, Ohioana directly serves more than a half-million Ohioans each year, promotes reading and writing, and promotes and celebrates our state as one of the nation's great literary centers.

For example, in the past two years, Ohioana presented one of America's most renowned historian, David McCullough, in an event celebrating our 90th anniversary at the Ohio Statehouse. Governor and Mrs. DeWine chaired the event which was recorded live by C-SPAN and aired on BOOK-TV, which gained a national audience.

The Ohioana Book Festival, which this April marks its 15th anniversary, has grown from ten Ohio authors to nearly 150. The audience has grown from a few hundred to more than 50,000 live and virtual attendees. It is now the single largest event celebrating Ohio authors and books.

The Ohioana Awards, which this October marks its 80th anniversary, is the second oldest state literary prize in the nation. Nearly every major Ohio author of the past 80 years has been honored, from James Thurber to Toni Morrison.

The Ohio Literary Trail, a new program which we introduced just last summer, shines the spotlight on Ohio's unique role in shaping culture and literature worldwide, with more than 70 sites across the Buckeye state, paying tribute to the authors, poets, illustrators, libraries, and creative influencers of the written word who have called Ohio home.

Obviously, 2020 proved to be a year of unexpected challenges. In the face of a pandemic, we had to shift gears, serving the public while keeping everyone safe. With the library closed since March, our staff, working remotely, found new ways to connect readers and writers, going virtual with our two biggest events of the year and introducing a new program (the Ohio Literary Trail) that drew statewide attention.

Our thanks to Governor DeWine and to all the members of the Ohio General Assembly who supported our efforts during this crisis.

As we look forward to a time when we can hold large gatherings once again, we pledge we will be there to serve the people and state of Ohio, as we have since our founding in 1929.

Eleven Ohio Governors and 36 consecutive General Assemblies since 1949 have acknowledged Ohioana's important work and affirmed the public value of this unique partnership by providing annual operating support, as authorized under the Ohio Revised Code (3375.61).

Of the \$305,000 recommended in the Executive Budget for Ohioana, \$180,000 funds a portion of salaries and benefits for the 4.0 FTE of the library. Ohioana employees are not state employees; neither do they receive any state-provided benefits, nor participate in PERS. The remaining \$125,000 funds space and the environment necessary to preserve and maintain the library collection, plus provide office space for staff and public space for researchers.

I would like to close with words from Cleveland author Anthony Doerr. In 2000, Tony won the Ohioana Walter Rumsey Marvin Grant for Ohio writers age 30 or younger who've not yet published a book. From winning that grant, Tony has gone on to become one of the world's greatest contemporary authors, and winner of the 2015 Pulitzer Prize in fiction. Here is the closing paragraph from a letter Tony sent in support of Ohioana in 2017:

"In a nation where reading is challenged on almost every front, from competing cultural entertainments, from deteriorating schools, from hyper-productive work schedules, and in an era when some state governments are basing estimates for their future prison populations on the literacy rates of their third-graders, the Ohioana Library Association is doing vital work to promote reading and writing all across Ohio, and they're doing it on an already razor-thin budget. With their collections, quarterly journal, book festival, grants, and awards, they enhance, secure, and bind both the literary community of Columbus and the great state of Ohio." – Anthony Doerr

Thank you, Chairman Cross.