



Senate Financial Institutions and Technology Committee
House Bill 2 – Broadband Expansion Program
Proponent Testimony
March 9, 2021

Chairman Wilson, Vice Chair Hottinger, Ranking Member Maharath, and members of the Senate Financial Institutions and Technology Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in support of House Bill (HB) 2.

My name is Jay Smith and I am the Director of Government and Legal Services for the Ohio Library Council (OLC). OLC is the statewide organization representing Ohio's 251 public library systems (rural, urban, and suburban) and the 8.4 million library cardholders they serve.

In testimony during the previous General Assembly on House Bill 13, we noted the importance of access to the internet in today's society and its essential function as a basic utility. That became even more evident and profound with the onset of the pandemic in 2020. When Ohio's public libraries temporarily closed their buildings to help stop the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), library staff quickly came up with ways to continue to serve their communities. Ohio's libraries rapidly adapted their services by launching virtual programs, expanding digital collections, and sought out ways to help Ohioans get connected with internet access. In 2020, public libraries saw a 33% increase in digital book circulation (e-books and audiobooks) over 2019.

While libraries expanded online services like e-books, streaming media, and new virtual programming, many libraries made enhancements to keep their Wi-Fi on. For example, the Bossard Memorial Public Library (Gallia County) extended its Wi-Fi capabilities so that people could access the library's internet from the parking lot. The library also loaned all of its mobile Wi-Fi hotspots, giving some to students who were taking online classes. The Elyria Public Library loaned iPads to their local nursing home so residents could continue to read online and stay connected with their families.

In previous testimony, we had cited the fact that many libraries leave their Wi-Fi signals on at night. A library in southeast Ohio reported that 50% of their Wi-Fi usage takes place after the library's normal business hours. Access to the internet in turn supports distance learning, unemployment assistance and other resources for impacted workers and businesses.

Attached to this testimony are some news articles and links showing how libraries have worked to help offer access to the internet in their communities.

HB 2 will help incentivize the expansion of broadband access into much needed areas of the state. We would like to thank Representatives Carfagna and Stewart for introducing this legislation and reinforce our strong support for its passage.

495 Metro Place South
Suite 350
Dublin, OH 43017-5399

P: (614) 410-8092
F: (614) 410-8098
www.olc.org

Dayton Daily News

Dayton Metro Library accepting applications for internet program

BY KRISTEN SPICKER | JAN 6, 2021

The Dayton Metro Library is now accepting applications for Get Connected, a program that will provide four months of free wireless internet to area residents.

All branches are accepting applications through Feb. 27 or until the 800-household maximum is reached. Applications are available at all branches and online at daytonmetrolibrary.org/getconnected.

“It’s important to apply early, as the program will close as soon as our maximum is reached,” said Diane Farrell, director of External Relations and Development.

To be eligible, households must be in the Dayton Metro Library and Spectrum service areas. Applicants also must be a library cardholder age 18 and older.

Under the program, Dayton Metro Library will be the initial account holder and will cover the cost of wireless service and equipment for four months. At the end of that period, participants can transfer the service into their own name or return the equipment and let the service end. Those who decide to have the service transferred may be eligible for lower rates through Spectrum’s Internet Assist Program.

“Dayton Metro Library is committed to building equity in the community,” said Tim Kambitsch, Dayton Metro Library executive director. “This includes connecting patrons with support systems and increasing access to resources for minority, disadvantaged and new residents. By providing free home internet access, we are breaking down barriers and providing an opportunity for people to continue affordable internet access into the future. This could positively impact a child’s success in school, an adult’s search for employment or an older person’s ability to stay connected with friends and family.”

The Get Connected program was made possible by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and CARES Act funds.

For more details visit daytonmetrolibrary.org/getconnected or call the library’s Ask Me Line at 937-463-2665.

Ohio Library System Introduces Ruggedized Laptop Checkout

BY KRISTI R. GARABRANDT, THE DAILY JEFFERSONIAN | OCTOBER 12, 2020

The Guernsey County Public Library system will begin checking out six Chromebooks for patrons in good standing as a way to help families navigating coronavirus-related homeschooling efforts.

(TNS) — The Guernsey County Public Library system continues its effort to bring more technology to library patrons with the addition of Chromebooks.

On Oct. 1, the library started circulating six Chromebooks, two at each of the three branches.

The laptops can be checked out by an adult with a library card in good standing for a two-week period.

"At this time, when so many people are socially distancing, the library wanted to help however it could, so we made the decision to lend out these Chromebooks for people to use in their own homes," Luke Bentley, the library's assistant director, said.

The process for checking out of the Chromebooks will be similar to that of the hotspots. Each borrower will have to fill out and sign a lending agreement stating that the devices will be returned in good condition within the check-out period. If the equipment is not returned or is returned damaged, the borrower will be responsible for paying the replacement cost. The Chromebooks cannot leave the building with a borrower until the agreement has been signed, Bentley said.

According to Bentley, the Chromebooks purchased by the library are a little more costly than most of the Chromebooks people may see, but that is due to the library Chromebooks being ruggedized so they are ready for wear and tear. Bentley noted the library wanted to make sure that they got good solid devices for people to take out and take home and go back and forth.

"These are pretty darn sturdy for laptops," Bentley said, "They are a good model.

The purchase of the Chromebooks was funded by the library.

According to Bentley, the Chromebooks are something that the library felt they needed to do because of so many parents trying to educate their children at home, people working from home, and general connectivity issues.

"Right now, with the limits we have inside the library with people only being able to use the computers for 30 minutes at a time, it just seemed like a pretty reasonable investment for us to try to mitigate what is happening right now," Bentley said. "But also it's just another step toward not just creating connectivity for people but the ability to access the Internet in their homes."

The Chromebooks function as a laptop or as a tablet and each circulates with a hotspot because Chromebooks are cloud-based, so they require the Internet to function properly. The hotspots will have unlimited data use.

For patron privacy, nothing is saved on the Chromebooks. As long as the borrower signs out of the computer when they are finished using it, the computer will wipe itself clean of the user's viewing history.

"This is something we felt very passionate about trying to get going," Bentley said. "We are just looking forward to the future of the libraries. It's possible if COVID hadn't happened we might not have been so gung ho into it but right now it made perfect sense to us."

Bentley noted that the Chromebooks also made sense to the library because they are something that the library can control. If the borrower is late returning it to the library, staff members can deactivate it making it useless. The Chromebook will flash a message that it is overdue and turn off until returned.

"As we've done recently with our drones, Wonderbooks, Launchpads, and other items, we are always doing our best to look to the future as to what the needs of our community will be," Bentley said. "These Chromebooks definitely fit into our view of how libraries need to be moving forward: quickly adapting to community needs."

Chromebooks are available at all three library locations and can be placed on reserve either online or by calling any branch.

Other articles and links:

Athens County Public Libraries was featured in the *The Wall Street Journal* for their efforts to provide broadband internet connectivity to local residents.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-people-left-behind-in-a-broadband-world-11573501015>

Here's the original essay with powerful images by Elisabeth Moughon, an Ohio University photojournalism student

who was working on a story about broadband access in southeast Ohio for her capstone project.

<https://spark.adobe.com/page/Ye4Kk1ecfKXGn/>

Fairfort Harbor Public Library will soon loan WiFi hotspots

https://www.news-herald.com/news/lake-county/fairport-harbor-public-library-to-take-part-in-libraries-transforming-communities/article_5fda2e32-5f28-11eb-adf1-f3d84b0f5b38.html

St. Paris Public Library set up Study Hubs for students who need internet access or a quiet spot for remote learning.

<https://www.facebook.com/165617676808041/photos/a.563367107033094/2585334318169686/?type=3&theater>

The Elyria Public Library loaned iPads to their local nursing home so residents could continue to read online and stay connected with their families.

Adams County - with Foundation for Appalachian Ohio (FAO) WiFi hotspots

<https://www.peoplesdefender.com/2020/12/17/adams-county-library-news-44/>

Tuscarawas County Public Library Systems loaning WiFi hotspots

<https://tusco.tv/news/tuscarawas-county-public-library-system-checking-out-wi-fi-hotspots>

Dover Public Library loaning WiFi hotspots

<https://www.timesreporter.com/news/20190919/dover-public-library-circulating-wifi-hotspots>

Lorain Public Library System loaning WiFi hotspots

<https://chroniclet.com/news/164652/hotspots-now-available-at-the-lorain-public-library/>

WiFi in Cleveland-area library parking lots article

<https://www.cleveland.com/news/2020/03/need-free-wifi-during-coronavirus-crisis-libraries-offer-internet-in-parking-lots.html>

Bossard Memorial Library

<https://www.mydailyregister.com/news/15182/wi-fi-to-go-program-expanded-due-to-demand>