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Article 2

Public Libraries Call For Restoration Of Funding In Budget

Library officials from across the state on Tuesday pushed their case for more funding by way of the two-year operating budget.

Jay Smith, director of government and legal services at the Ohio Library Council, told members of the **Senate Local Government & Elections** Committee that the House version of the spending outline (**HB 110**) reduces the Public Library Fund from 1.7% of the General Revenue Fund to 1.66%.

"State funding through the PLF is critically important because it remains a primary source of revenue for public libraries," he said. "Statewide, more than 48% of the total funding for Ohio's public libraries comes from the state through the PLF. In addition, 20% of Ohio's public library systems - 50 of 251 - do not have a local property tax levy and rely solely on their state funding as their main source of revenue for day-to-day operations."

Mr. Smith also sought to dispel the notion that public libraries are set to receive a windfall of federal funding, telling the panel that the American Rescue Plan will make an estimated \$4.5 million available to all libraries across the state.

Those funds must be divided among academic libraries, K-12 libraries, prison libraries and public libraries, he said.

OLC Executive Director Michelle Francis highlighted the services libraries provide to Ohioans, including census outreach, technology assistance, homework help, tax services and broadband access.

"Over the last year, many of our libraries had parking lots filled with rows of cars utilizing the Wi-Fi for school, work, and personal use," she said. "Some libraries even had individuals set up their own table with a computer and printer outside of the library and had food delivered while they were utilizing the library's Wi-Fi and electrical outlets outside of the building."

Michael Penrod, director of the Wood County District Public Library, said that for every dollar his library system spent in 2019, it delivered \$4.69 in value to the community.

"In 2008, WCDPL received \$1,637,396 from the PLF," he said. "In 2020, WCDPL received \$1,569,273. The 2020 distribution was still 4.2% less than that of 10 years ago, and without accounting for inflation."

In response to a question from **Sen. Sandra O'Brien** (R-Rome), Mr. Penrod said there are still Dr. Seuss books on the shelves of his libraries.

"Dr. Seuss is alive and well on the shelves of the Wood County Public Library," he said.

Columbus Metropolitan Library CEO Patrick Losinski said the House's version of the budget would reduce library funding to Fiscal Year 2015 levels.

"Now is not the time to cut operating funds for Ohio's public libraries," he said. "Throughout the pandemic, the PLF helped libraries address increased costs to transition services into virtual platforms, ensure the safety and well-being of staff and customers through PPE and sanitation resources to enable our buildings to remain open, and most notably, support CML's 25% increase – nearly \$450,000 – in e-content expenditures to meet the growing demand of our customers."

Jason Kucsma, executive director of the Toledo Lucas County Public Library, wrote with concerns about the reduction in the PLF percentage along with reducing the base of GRF by 2% through an income tax cut.

The panel also received written interested party testimony from representatives of the Cincinnati Hamilton County Public Library and the Dayton Metro Library.