

TO: Senate Local Government and Elections Committee
FROM: Patrick Losinski, CEO, Columbus Metropolitan Library
RE: Testimony concerning Substitute House Bill 110
DATE: May 4, 2021

Dear Chairwoman Gavarone, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Maharath, and members of the Local Government and Elections Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding Substitute House Bill 110 and the implications therein for public libraries in Ohio. I am writing to respectfully request the Committee maintains the Public Library Fund (PLF) at 1.7% of the General Revenue Fund (GRF) in the FY22-23 biennium budget and holds public libraries harmless from any unintended consequences that may result from tax reform.

Columbus Metropolitan Library (CML) has served residents in Franklin County, Ohio, since 1873. At our Main Library and 22 branches, we take pride in meeting community needs through our signature services and programs, such as Homework Help Centers, Reading Buddies, Summer Reading Challenge and Ready for Kindergarten. Our vision of "a thriving community where wisdom prevails" is at the forefront of our work as we respond to areas of urgent need: kids unprepared for kindergarten, third grade reading proficiency, high school graduation, college and career readiness, and employment resource needs, all of which are even more critical as the community recovers from the pandemic.

Ohio's public libraries serve more than 8.4 million cardholders. The PLF makes this possible by providing a reliable funding stream so libraries can deliver critical community services. As currently proposed in Sub HB 110, the PLF percentage will be reduced from 1.7% of the GRF to 1.66%. Additionally, the base of the GRF will be impacted by the proposed income tax cut, which will further compound reductions in funding for public libraries.

The PLF has not been reduced to 1.66% since FY 2015 – a testament to the General Assembly's recognition of the value of public libraries, along with recognition that public libraries have remained under funded since 2008, when the PLF was 2.22% of the GRF. It is important to note that in the past seven years, only once did the PLF distribution actually meet the estimates from the Ohio Office of Budget and Management and Legislative Service Commission that were included in the final state budget documents. In fact, since FY14, PLF distributions have totaled \$95 million less than estimated.

It is also important to clarify that public libraries are not receiving \$170 million in federal funding through the American Rescue Plan. Instead, about \$200 million will go to libraries nationwide through the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services. Of that amount, the State Library of Ohio will receive an estimated \$4.5 million to divide among university academic libraries, K-12 school libraries, and public libraries that apply for one-time, project based opportunities – not operating dollars. And, even though public libraries are separate political subdivisions in the state of Ohio, we are not receiving the billions of dollars that other local government units will be receiving directly through American Rescue Plan.

Now is not the time to cut operating funds for Ohio's public libraries. 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. In direct response to the pandemic, we are actively repurposing our Young Minds programming to help mitigate the literacy and learning gap that so many kids experienced these past 15 months, and we are enhancing our Life Skills programming to include greater access to social work services, digital life skills, and career pathways to address the needs expressed by our customers. We all understand there will be no “quick fix” to these compounded losses and public libraries in our state are prepared to help over the long haul. But we need your continued investment and support. Our costs to deliver critical services will continue to grow as we help the community recover from the far-reaching effects of the pandemic.

On behalf of Columbus Metropolitan Library, our 625,000+ cardholders, and the 250 public library systems in our state, I respectfully request the Senate maintain the PLF at 1.7% and subsequently hold public libraries harmless from tax reform.

Thank you for your consideration.

