

House Finance Committee

House Bill 110 Testimony

March 10, 2021

Good afternoon, Chairman Oelslager and members of the Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony today on House Bill (HB) 110 on behalf of Ohio's public libraries.

My name is Andrew Mangels, and I am the Director of Westlake Porter Public Library. Westlake is a suburb of Cleveland and serves a population of 32,729. Westlake Porter Public Library is consistently ranked as one of the best libraries in the nation along with so many other Ohio libraries. Ohio's libraries are the best in the nation because previous members of the legislature had the wisdom and vision to provide a reliable system of funding to ensure that all Ohioans were guaranteed access to information and the resources so important for building strong communities.

This past year has been challenging for everyone. Westlake Porter Public Library adapted and improvised in order to provide valuable services the majority of this past year that helped people get through this pandemic. We were an early adopter of the curbside model of checking materials out to patrons and an even earlier adopter of providing access to public PC and Internet use. During times when the ability to browse in person was limited, we continually offered in person use of our high-speed computers and a strong Wi-Fi signal for use outside of our building.

Over the past year, we received innumerable comments from patrons that were grateful, not only for the services we were providing, but for the thoughtfulness put into ensuring the safety of our patrons and staff.

The toughest part of Covid restrictions for libraries was the inability to host in person programs and meetings for patrons. We very quickly began developing content for virtual programming that was tremendously successful. So much so that, even when things get "back to normal" we will continue to incorporate the virtual experience for those that may find it difficult to physically come to the library.

One area we have paid particular attention to is early literacy. Westlake Porter Public Library has been an avid supporter of the Governor's Imagination Library program and recently launched the Myrna Chelko Early Literacy Initiative which includes have children under five participate in the Imagination Library, 1000 Books before Kindergarten, attend storytime, and check out a Sprout Early Literacy Backpack. We had over 30 participants register the first week it was offered.

At Westlake Porter Public Library, we are proud of our partnerships and how we leverage those relationships to make a greater impact. Connecting for Kids is one of our key strategic partners and together we work to assist families who have a concern about their child's development. Through our collection of books and videos, parent education programs, Music Therapy and More, and Teach Me to Play we have helped thousands of families across Northeast Ohio, especially as other libraries have joined this partnership to extend our reach.

Financial support of public libraries through the Public Library Fund is something that Ohio should be exceedingly proud of. It demonstrates a commitment to education, community, and democracy. The PLF is one of soundest investments the State Legislature can make in the future of our state. There are many needs and difficult budget decisions are looming. I respectfully ask that you make the easiest decision of the entire budget process and support continuing the Public Library Fund at 1.7% of the General Revenue Fund.

On behalf of Westlake Porter Public Library, thank you for your consideration of making public libraries a priority in this budget and maintaining the PLF at 1.7% is a step in the right direction. I welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you may have about how our library makes a positive impact on a daily basis in our community.