



Good afternoon, Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chairman Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and members of the House Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill (HB) 110 on behalf of Ohio's public libraries.

My name is Chris May and I am the Director/Fiscal Officer of the Mansfield/Richland County Public Library. MRCPL is just one of Ohio's 251 public library systems (rural, urban, and suburban). We serve over 70,000 of the 8.4 million Ohio library cardholders.

I would like to share my thoughts on certain provisions in the budget proposal related to the Public Library Fund (PLF) and we hope to give you a glimpse of the services provided to our community throughout the pandemic by public libraries and how Ohio's libraries can assist in the state's recovery efforts.

Ohio's public libraries are extremely popular and in high demand with the highest use per capita in the nation. We have the highest percentage of registered borrowers, highest number of visits, and highest circulation. Libraries are open to all and a resource that Ohio's citizens increasingly turn to for vital services. Our success is dependent on the strong partnership between the State and the local library systems.

Public library services are essential to the communities we serve. This was already evident pre-pandemic and became even more profound over the past year. Our services go well beyond books, as we have found during the past year. We meet patrons where they are – if they are at home, at school, at assisted living facilities and nursing homes, or outside of our buildings. Libraries today provide a wide range of services to Ohio's citizens based on the needs of each individual community. We serve as a critical resource by providing connectivity to the Internet and computers for personal, employment and student use. Such service is provided by wireless connectivity around our locations, computers (with one-on-one assistance) inside our libraries, and checking out Wi-Fi hotspots for use at home. We serve as free meal sites for those impacted by food insecurity. Our patrons utilize their local libraries for job search assistance, online training and to start small businesses.

In March 2020, we quickly pivoted and adjusted their service delivery models to continue to meet the needs of our communities. Here are just a few specific examples of how our library provides service throughout the pandemic:

- 2020 Census outreach
- Voting registration
- Wi-Fi on library property
- Wi-Fi hot spots

- Digital resources (MRCPL saw an approximate 15% increase in usage)
- Online educational courses through LinkedIn Learning/Lynda.com
- Chat reference
- Tech assistance
- Free meal distribution
- Outreach to seniors and nursing homes
- Job search assistance
- Tax services
- Curbside pickup service
- Virtual story times and programs

The introduced version of HB 110 would reduce state funding to Ohio's public libraries from 1.7% to 1.66% of the state's GRF. In fact, our funding has not been set at this reduced rate since FY15. Under the Governor's proposal, OBM is estimating the PLF will decrease by 0.5% in FY22 and increase by 3.5% in FY23. However, these estimates are based on assumed growth in Ohio's economy and the assumption that no additional policy changes will impact the GRF. Most often, libraries do not realize these estimates. Only once in the past seven years has the PLF met the estimates included in budget documents.

In conclusion, investing in public libraries is critical as the usage and demand for our services is growing and broadening – especially as we assist in Ohio's recovery efforts. The robust services our patrons expect and deserve are not possible without stable funding. You will not find a more passionate group of professionals who are eager to help Ohioans with whatever their needs may be than our library workers. Making public libraries a priority in this budget and maintaining the PLF at 1.7% is a step in the right direction.

Thank you for your time.