

**House Finance Committee
House Bill 110 Testimony**

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and members of the House Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill (HB) 110 on behalf of the Puskarich Public Library.

My name is Sandi Thompson, and I am the Director of the Puskarich Public Library located in Harrison County, OH. Our library has a rural service area of over 13,000 residents in southeast Ohio, and I would like to share my thoughts on how important our library is to our communities and how people have come to rely on libraries for services and internet access especially throughout the pandemic.

When patrons could not come into our library and wanted to stay safe, our library made home deliveries to those who were elderly or at-risk. Our staff also made curbside pickup available to anyone who needed materials. The library had 24/7 Wi-Fi access available at our locations in Scio, Cadiz, and Freeport for students who needed it for online learning and others who were working from home. True broadband access continues to be an issue in Harrison County. The library during the pandemic applied for a grant through the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio which made available an additional 15 Wi-Fi hotspots.



The Puskarich Public Library System continued to offer three story times each week using Zoom helping to build early literacy skills. Our book club moved to an online format which proved more popular than our traditional book clubs. The online book club attracted additional younger readers that had never participated before the pandemic.

There was a major renovation that had been planned for 2020. Rather than shutter the project, the Puskarich Public Library pushed on using the time when in person traffic was reduced to complete a full main floor renovation that included using funding for COVID projects from the State Legislature to install handicapped accessible automatic doors and safer access to restroom facilities. The new floor plan incor-

porates appropriate spacing for library users, and brings a new level of technology offerings including video conferencing equipment to make participation in virtual meetings more convenient for residents. Staff worked very hard during this time moving over 90,000 items so the renovation could continue.

When Summer Reading rolled out last Summer, the library was quick to offer an online alternative so that children would be encouraged to continue reading through the Summer and keep their skills at grade level and avoid the "Summer slide." The library offered drive-thru programs and allowed participants to pick up activities.

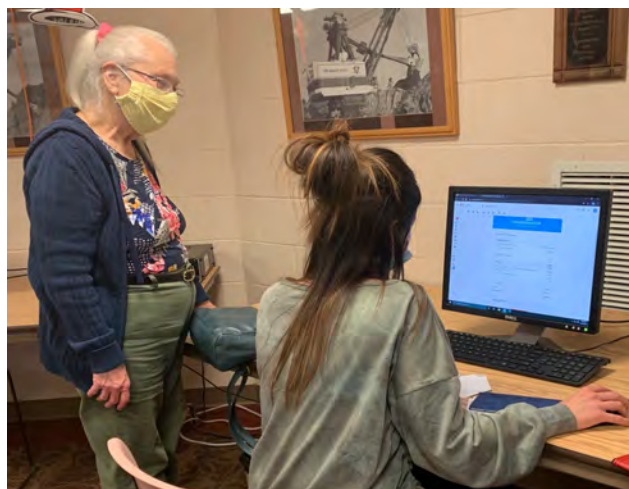


Our library works with our users and is responsive to community needs. Several individuals in our service area who wanted safer access to books were able to use the new, outdoor “Little Free Library” that was placed in Jewett by the Friends of the Puskarich Public Library.

At this same time, the library promoted its online book services and other ways to download materials directly at home. Use of downloadable books, magazines, movies and audiobooks took off and doubled in usage in 2020.



While our libraries continue to offer traditional services, more and more, library staff help residents with online needs such as job applications, finding tax forms, helping with online unemployment, and scheduling online vaccine appointments including Senior citizens, minority populations and economically disadvantaged residents. Our library has now stepped in to help make COVID testing more convenient and accessible by offering the rapid COVID tests to pick up at their libraries!



For these services and more to continue, libraries need resources. Our public libraries could not offer all these programs and materials without state funding. Libraries are here to help and for many residents we are their primary link to technology, Internet access and lifelong learning. Making public libraries a priority in this budget and maintaining the PLF at 1.7% is crucial for our State's recovery. I urge our Representatives in the Ohio House to keep the PLF at our current (FY21) rate of 1.7% as libraries throughout our State strive to improve the lives of the residents we serve.

Please feel free to reach out with any questions or for additional information!

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