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Written Testimony from TLCPL and Friends of the Library

To: Ohio House Finance Committee

From: Toledo Lucas County Public Library (TLCPL), and Friends of the Library (FOL)

Date: March 11, 2021

Re: House Bill 110 Written Testimony

We, the officials of the **Toledo Lucas County Public Library (TLCPL)**, a Lucas County system comprised of 20 locations with headquarters based in Toledo, OH, and members of the **Friends of the Library of TLCPL**, an organization supporting the system via fundraising efforts, are submitting this collective written testimony in favor of maintaining the Public Library Fund (PLF) at 1.7 percent of the General Revenue Fund.

We are providing this testimony to convey our thoughts on provisions in the budget proposal as it relates to the Public Library Fund (PLF). The statutory PLF level of 1.66 percent, as currently proposed, does not account for the vast needs of Ohio's 251 public libraries and the 8.4 million library cardholders they serve, who from their rural, urban and suburban locales, have all contributed tirelessly during the pandemic to help customers and community residents.

Below, are reasons for our position, and examples of the numerous ways TLCPL and FOL contributed and helped in our community during a very trying time:

A TLCPL customer recently expressed his love for his neighborhood branch and shared the following: "public libraries are one of the great equalizers in our society."

We couldn't agree more with this customer's heartfelt sentiment. Since 1838, our historic system has supported essential literacies, fostered a culture of innovation and leadership, and strengthened community engagement, three key areas of continuing focus for our system.

The unprecedented events of the COVID global pandemic have and continue to present challenges for Ohio's public libraries, normally locations bustling with activity from morning to night with people across age, racial, religious, and cultural spectrums. In 2018 and 2019, before the pandemic, TLCPL saw some 3 million visitors at our locations, so imagine the wrenching, yet necessary, decision to close our doors in March 2020. TLCPL was one of the first public libraries in Ohio and in the nation to make such a tough call to shut down to keep our staff and customers safe while we learned more about the novel coronavirus and its spread.

However, while closed, we never stopped being a shared space – sometimes virtually - to help individuals and families make connections that ultimately strengthen our community. Our 2016-2020 Strategic Plan positions

TLCPL as Lucas County's hub for learning, connecting, innovation and growth. Many members of Ohio's General Assembly and countless community leaders helped our administration and staff to process our Plan's direction and priorities, and for that we are forever grateful.

So, what did we do in fulfilling our Plan's promises to the community?

We quickly learned to pivot and shift our focus in 2020, and currently in this first quarter of 2021, to address the new and unexpected needs of our community. We provided, and in some cases continue to supply, parking lot space to feed youth in need; Wi-Fi 24 hours for customers to utilize for unemployment, 2020 Census forms, and virtual education; partnerships with corporations to make face shields with our 3-D printers, turning book drop units into collection sites for homemade masks and so much more. TLCPL never stopped in our commitment to help move our region forward. In fact, we unapologetically stand in the gap for many whom we support with our programming, initiatives, and offerings.

In the first half of 2021, our priorities shifted to a being one of the primary trusted sources for COVID vaccination information. Our system partnered with local and state government in helping our customers and community residents to navigate pre-registration for vaccinations. We also stand ready to serve as a potential point of distribution site, if ever needed, especially in underserved communities. We have participated actively in our community's **V-Project** (V for VICTORY over COVID), a planning committee comprised of more than 250 organizations collectively figuring out the best methodologies for distribution.

As we learn to live with COVID-19, while staying patient for its eradication, it is imperative that we continue planning for future years of organizational strategy to move forward as an anchor hub and social infrastructure. We cannot do that operating with funding levels that are still in 1990s levels.

Thank you for your long-standing support of our system, from your advocacy of Ohio public library funding needed to continue our vital work – your assistance is accepted with gratitude and does not go unnoticed.

Thank you for your long-term support and full understanding of the ebb and flow of the PLF, and for your consideration of maintaining the PLF at 1.7 percent of the General Revenue Fund.