

Senate Finance Committee
Substitute House Bill 110 Written Testimony
May 19, 2021

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on Substitute House Bill 110.

My name is Pam Hickson-Stevenson, and I am the Executive Director of the Akron-Summit County Public Library (ASCPL). Our library system consists of a main library in beautiful downtown Akron and eighteen branches, nine located in the City of Akron and nine in other Summit County communities. The ASCPL serves a population of more than 375,000 not only through 19 facilities but also with two bookmobiles and a lobby-stop box truck. In 2019, we circulated more than 4.4 million items in digital and physical formats. The public visited us more than 2 million times and used our computers and Wi-Fi more than 1 million times. Our dedicated and talented librarians provided more than 7,000 programs. And we are very proud to have been designated a Star Library in January 2021 by *Library Journal*, a library industry magazine. None of this would have been possible without our funding through the Public Library Fund (PLF), a demonstration of the commitment that the state of Ohio has made to its citizens.

The Public Library Fund provides approximately 44% of the ASCPL's income, while the Library's 1.9 mill local property tax provides about 55% of the income. That property tax, by the way, renewed on May 4 with **76%** of voters approving. This resounding success is evidence of how much the community values what the Library provides and how it serves.

Sub HB 110 currently contains two provisions that will negatively affect Ohio's public libraries: cutting the PLF percentage from 1.70% to 1.66% and reducing the base of the General Revenue Fund with a 2% income tax cut.

Maintaining the PLF at 1.70% is important for many reasons. Babies and preschoolers begin their learning journey by gaining important early literacy skills with books and programs offered by the Library. Students use the Library's print and digital resources to supplement their school-based and home-school based education. Library resources, Wi-Fi, and after school support are vital to their continued academic growth. Library staff worked with teachers while students were attending school virtually, providing instruction in the use of digital resources and reinforcing the importance of and joy found in reading.

Adults utilize a wide array of services only available through the Library. The Library provides essential resources to employers and employees. Online educational opportunities abound through digital resources such as LinkedIn Learning and Mometrix, which offers unlimited and free access to test preparation materials for more than 1,000 different standardized exams including Praxis, nursing, medical technology, construction, and industry exams. Library trainers provide important classes in using computers, computer software, and popular apps.

Seniors are customers who hold a special place in the hearts of our staff. They utilize all services and materials that the Library provides including books, DVDs, books on CD, digital resources and Library programs that bring them together in informative and fun activities. Additionally, the Library offers a mail service that is free of charge for homebound individuals and those caring for someone who is homebound.

In recent surveys of parents who attended the ASCPL's story times, 91% of the attendees stated they learned something they can share with their children; 87% of them intended to spend more time interacting with their children; and 83% of them felt more confident helping their children learn. And in recent surveys of computer class attendees, 90% of the attendees felt more knowledgeable about using digital resources, while 88% of them felt more confident using digital resources.

Libraries remain gathering places for activities that keep neighborhoods, towns, and cities vibrant and connected. Only public libraries can provide all of these services to our communities. No other publicly funded organization provides all that Ohio's public libraries provide for Ohioans. It is clear that Ohioans love their libraries. More than 8.4 million Ohioans are registered borrowers, and Ohio has the highest library use per capita in the country. That success is dependent on the strong partnership between the state and the local public libraries. Now is not the time to cut public library funding.

I urge you to preserve the Public Library Fund at the current rate of 1.7% of the General Revenue Fund and to hold Ohio's public libraries harmless from any tax reform that is enacted in this biennial budget.

Thank you for your time, attention, and consideration.