



SENATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

HB110

OPERATING BUDGET (Oelslager S) To make operating appropriations for the biennium beginning July 1, 2021, and ending June 30, 2023, to levy taxes, and to provide authorization and conditions for the operation of state programs.

Ohio Library Council

Staff of the Ohio Library Council and representatives of several Ohio library systems submitted testimony on library funding, urging the Senate to extend the current budget's increase in the percentage of GRF tax revenue going to the Public Library Fund from 1.66 percent to 1.7 percent. (See *The Hannah Report*, 5/3/21). The executive and House version of the budget did not include extension of this increase.

"State funding through the PLF is critically important because it remains a primary source of revenue for public libraries. Statewide, more than 48 percent of the total funding for Ohio's public libraries comes from the state through the PLF. In addition, 20 percent of Ohio's public library systems (50 of 251) do not have a local property tax levy and rely solely on their state funding as their main source of revenue for day-to-day operations. As a reminder, our libraries are separate political subdivisions, similar to our other local government partners, but we do not have taxing authority to implement a local sales tax or income tax. Also, unlike counties, cities and school districts, public libraries do not receive casino revenue. Therefore, we are concerned that HB110 proposes to reduce the PLF to the same rate as the Local Government Fund (LGF)," said OLC's Jay Smith, director of government and legal services. He also noted that libraries are not receiving large amounts of federal funding from the federal American Rescue Plan Act, unlike other political subdivisions.

OLC Executive Director Michelle Francis described libraries' efforts to adapt service models to the pandemic, working to provide WiFi hot spots, conduct 2020 Census outreach, serve as food assistance distribution sites, offering curbside and drive through pickup, providing virtual story times and many others.

Also providing testimony in favor of maintaining the current PLF funding were representatives of local library systems including Dayton Metro Library, Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library, Columbus Metropolitan Library and Wood County District Library.

Sen. Cirino asked if libraries provide assistance in filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Francis said they do, along with other assistance like ACT and SAT test preparation



Sen. Maharath said PLF funding appeared to be lower than what was projected; Francis said that was affected by state revenues.

Sen. O'Brien said she'd heard some criticism of libraries over their decisions to close during the pandemic. Francis said while many closed their doors as a safety matter early on when they couldn't get personal protective equipment, they continued to offer services virtually and curbside. Once the state was able to provide some PPE funding, many began to reopen, she said.

Michael Penrod of Wood County District Library told Chair Gavarone his system experienced the highest circulation since 2015 for some categories of children's books.

O'Brien asked about recent controversy over Dr. Seuss books. Penrod said his library maintains a wide range of children's literature, including those books. "Dr. Seuss is alive and well on the shelves of the Wood County District Public Library."

After Columbus Metropolitan Library's Patrick Losinski asked for the Senate to consider holding libraries harmless from effects of a proposed income tax cut in the House version of the budget, Cirino asked his thoughts on the argument that tax cuts can lead to greater revenue via economic growth. Losinski said he made his comments with the past several years' experience in mind, noting a cumulative shortfall of \$95 million versus projections for PLF distributions since 2014.

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