



Harris-Elmore | Genoa Libraries

www.harriselmorelibrary.org

Harris-Elmore Library
328 Toledo Street - Elmore, Oh 43416
Phone 419-862-2482

Genoa Branch Library
602 West Street, Genoa Ohio 43430
Phone 419-855-3380

TO: Senate Finance Committee
FROM: Jennifer Fording, Director of the Harris-Elmore Public Library & Genoa Branch Library
RE: Testimony concerning Substitute House Bill 110
DATE: May 19, 2021

Dear Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding Substitute House Bill 110 and the implications therein for public libraries in Ohio. I am writing to respectfully request the Committee maintains the Public Library Fund (PLF) at 1.7% of the General Revenue Fund (GRF) in the FY22-23 biennium budget and holds public libraries harmless from any unintended consequences that may result from tax reform.

You have heard from a number of larger libraries and library advocates about what our public libraries provide and what a devastating blow it would be should the PLF be cut. As the Director of a small library, I offer an additional perspective in which I hope you will consider. Almost half of Ohio's 251 Public Libraries are considered "small" with a service population of under 10,000 and budgets under 1 million dollars. Though we may not have as many people walking through our doors, the ones that do are the ones that often need these services the most and are often neglected at a state and federal level as they are too difficult to reach. In 2019, we had 102,098 items circulated; 5,578 cardholders; 18,616 visitors—with 16,000 of them using computers or WIFI; and though that may seem somewhat negligible in the grand scheme of things, it is everything to those that depend on our services.

During the pandemic, we have had to step up our offerings and change the way that we provide our services. We now offer:

- Hotspot & Chromebook lending
- Free WIFI extending past our parking lots
- Curbside pickup
- Online Chat/Reservations/Reference
- Distribution of Covid-19 Rapid Test Kits (in partnership with the Ohio Health Dept.)
- Moving programming online through Zoom and YouTube
- Grab n Go Kits
- Testing/Study Center & Small Group Meetings
- Unemployment Sign-Up Help

Hours of Operation

Monday through Thursday: 10 a.m. til 8 p.m. ♦ Friday & Saturday: 10 a.m. til 5 p.m.

Closed Sunday



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- Resources & Aid for Job Seekers
- Technology Troubleshooting Drop-ins
- Aid in Making Covid-19 Vaccination Appointments
- Free Notary Service
- Database offering & Homework Help
- Homeschooling Resources
- E-books & Audiobooks along with our regular collections
- Providing Voting Forums with local candidates to educate the public on important issues
- Providing an Extension of our Local History Museum
- Providing Genealogical Research in person & online
- Engaging monthly programming & early literacy options
- Working with local CIT officers to spread mental health awareness & to keep those affected patrons engaged & feeling accepted.

We have had numerous patrons come to the library seeking help for drug addiction and/or mental health issues. One patron in particular was in mental distress and having an episode in the library. We were able to calm her and immediately found her qualified help with people to talk to—resulting in her having a place to stay, a job, and a mental health specialist within 48 hours.

We would not be able to provide these services, nor be able to physically operate our libraries without the PLF. The much needed revenue stream provided by the PLF will affect sixty percent of our library budget and a cut may result in our library having to drastically reduce library materials, services, and staffing, which would have an adverse effect on our communities. In addition, we will be severely impacted by the proposed 2% income tax rate reduction, which will deplete our funding further. We implore you to hold libraries harmless when considering these tax cuts.

You may be under the impression that libraries are able to supplement our funding by applying for grants or receiving federal monies from Covid-19 relief funds; However, libraries are not eligible for the COVID-19 relief funds currently being discussed in the bill or the American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding going directly to local governments from the federal government. There are so many libraries, schools, etc. vying for the few grants that exist, that smaller libraries are almost always left out or do not meet the criteria for submission. If a grant is procured, it almost always has specific criteria or stipulations and cannot go toward operating costs.

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Libraries have proven time and time again that we can stretch a dollar to provide essential services to the public and smaller libraries especially have always found ways to go above and beyond with a lot less. It is well known that Ohioans and the Ohio Legislature have voiced their love for libraries and how we are such valuable assets on a state and personal level. It may be felt that out of so many businesses and establishments that are vying for a piece of the state budget, that libraries will be able to continue to provide the same services with less money, and we have exceeded expectations.

But shouldn't we invest more into libraries BECAUSE we are excellent stewards of our/your money? Are we not the perfect places to utilize these funds to maximum effect to provide a multitude of services to your constituents that may be lacking elsewhere?

Libraries can get creative with a lack of funding and try to find a way to provide for the needs of our patrons, but we cannot get creative when it comes to the maintenance of our buildings. We have had to save for nearly 30 years before we could add on to our small and cramped building and to bring it into the 21st century. Our branch library may have to wait perhaps 20 years more before they can get everything that they need to physically function at a level that can adequately support its community.

Please consider that we are not asking for you to raise the percentage of the PLF within the state budget, we only ask to maintain what we have. Also please consider the plight of small libraries that may not be able to continue to serve our communities if the PLF is cut further.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.

Jennifer Fording
Director
Harris-Elmore Public Library

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