

Ohio House Ways and Means Committee

Chairman Bill Roemer

Vice Chair Derek Merrin

Ranking Member Daniel P. Troy

Tuesday, March 14, 2023

House Bill 1 (Mathews) of the 135th General Assembly

Interested Party Testimony Provided by:

Hallie Rich, Chief Communications & External Relations Officer, Cuyahoga County Public Library

Thank you, Chairman Roemer, Vice Chair Merrin, Ranking Member Troy, and members of the Ways and Means Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Cuyahoga County Public Library (CCPL) regarding the House Bill 1.

Cuyahoga County Public Library (CCPL/the Library) serves about 615,000 residents across 47 communities with 27 branches in Cuyahoga County. The Library relies on the revenue it receives through local property taxes and the state Public Library Fund (PLF) to maintain the critical information resources and literacy services that CCPL provides. Residents in Cuyahoga County overwhelmingly support their library system, most recently approving a 1-mill levy in 2020 that – absent any major cuts to the Public Library Fund – was projected to fund the system for the foreseeable future.

We are alarmed by the vast impact House Bill 1 would have on the financial stability of Cuyahoga County Public Library and libraries, parks, schools, and municipalities across the state. A preliminary assessment of the impact of HB 1 on Cuyahoga County Public Library shows a \$8.3 million annual decrease, which represents approximately 9% of the Library's operating budget. The Library would suffer hits across all three key areas of the bill:

1. A decrease in the assessment value of local property from 35% to 31.5% would reduce funding by \$2.2 million annually;
2. The elimination of state reimbursements on property tax reductions (rollback, Homestead and Owner Occupancy Credit) would deplete \$4.75 million annually; and,
3. A reduction in the Public Library Fund due to the proposed flat income tax represents a \$1.34 million annual decrease.

This level of funding reduction would require the Library to make dramatic changes to long-term capital plans, including deferred maintenance on the system's 27 branches and scaling back or eliminating new and replacement branch projects. Over the past decade, the Library's \$110 million investments in branch capital projects – all done with local businesses – have not only advanced our ability to best serve residents but have represented real economic impact in terms of construction jobs and work for the building trades, architects, designers and ancillary businesses. Future opportunities for economic growth through the Library's capital investments would be lost or greatly diminished with House Bill 1.

In the short-term, the passage of House Bill 1 would force the Library to consider cuts across all major expenditure areas:

- Closing or reducing branch open hours;
- A decrease to the collection budget, which would mean fewer new materials and limitations in access to research databases;

- Fewer technology updates and programs such as storytimes, reading tutoring, technology training, and literacy services.

This is not the time to drastically alter public library funding. As Ohioans come out of the COVID-19 pandemic, their needs around workforce development, support for K-12 students, and long-term solutions to the digital divide are only set to grow. Public libraries remain well positioned to support the job seekers, students, families, and seniors whose lives have been most impacted by the pandemic. In fact, over the past year, Ohio's libraries stepped up to deliver services that filled critical community needs, including:

- Partnering with local school districts to address learning loss through reading tutoring and after-school homework help;
- Adding English language, basic literacy, and citizenship classes to support the influx of Afghani and Ukrainian refugees coming into the state; and
- Continuing to partner with entities to deliver community resources, such as our partnership with the Cleveland Foodbank on food distribution and the Ohio Department of Health and local public health agencies to support COVID-19 test kits and vaccination clinics.

As Ohio's public libraries have worked – and will continue to work – to support our communities, we do not stand to benefit from federal funding directed to local governments. In 2023, Ohio will receive \$5.5 million in library-specific federal funding from the Institute for Museum and Library Service, which is divided among the hundreds of Ohio university libraries, K-12 school libraries, prison libraries, and public libraries through competitive grants. This would not come close to covering the losses we will suffer if the massive overhaul to Ohio's tax structure proposed in House Bill 1 comes to pass.

I urge this committee to reject House Bill 1 and ensure that the assets Ohioans value and need – our libraries, parks, schools, police and fire, and more – continue to operate with the levels of funding that voters have overwhelmingly approved again and again.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Hallie Rich
Chief Communications & External Relations Officer
Cuyahoga County Public Library