



May 9, 2019

Ohio Library Council and Wood County District Public Library

Michelle Francis, director of government and legal services for the Ohio Library Council, provided testimony on behalf of the state's public library systems. Her testimony largely followed the testimony she provided to the House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education (see *The Hannah Report*, 4/11/19), highlighting the services that public libraries provide to the public at no cost. She touched on libraries' early childhood supports, workforce development initiatives, Internet and technology access and preparation for the 2020 census.

She commented on several changes in the House version, saying that they're still reviewing tax law in the latest version. The current House draft is maintaining their state funding at 1.68 percent of GRF, as did the governor's as-introduced version. She noted the Public Library Fund (PLF), which provides more than 48 percent of the funding for Ohio public libraries, may be impacted by tax changes. Because the PLF has not kept up with inflation and has not recovered from the recession, she urged the Senate to restore PLF funding to 2008 levels, and to hold libraries harmless from any additional unintended reductions in state funding.

Following Francis, testimony from a local perspective was provided by Michael Penrod, director of the Wood County District Public Library. He said his library system serves 60,000 in Bowling Green, eastern Toledo and other parts of Wood County. Penrod explained ways in which his library engages with the community, beginning with its 1,000 Books before Kindergarten program, which incentivizes kids to get an early start on their reading skills.

He also noted the impact of courses offered online through Lynda.com/LinkedIn learning, which teaches useful skills to both patrons and staff members. Penrod said they've used the courses to collaborate with groups in Wood County government, the chamber of commerce and more. Finally, he highlighted a partnership with the Northwestern Water and Sewer District's WaterShed project, which installed a clean

water vending unit at the Walbridge Library. Penrod echoed Francis' request, noting that their state support is still nearly \$450,000 less than it was in 2008 when adjusted for inflation.

Sen. Gavarone asked how library patron numbers have changed over the years. Penrod said that the number of individuals they served increased greatly after the recession and began leveling off in 2012. Now, that number continues to rise slowly each year. Additionally, he said that he has gone from 57 staff members pre-2008 to 29 staff members in 2010 and now has 46 staff members, all of whom are expected to do more than they used to.

Sen. Craig thanked the witnesses for their testimony and said that he's seen Columbus libraries in his area serve primarily as community centers. Francis thanked him for his comment and noted that Ohio's libraries have the highest use per capita in the country and largely serve as a shared civic space in communities that need them.