

To: Members of the Ohio House of Representatives

From: Michelle Francis, OLC Executive Director
Jay Smith, OLC Director of Government and Legal Services

Date: April 14, 2021

Re: State Budget Bill and Ohio's Public Libraries

As the statewide organization representing Ohio's 251 public library systems and the 8.4 million library cardholders they serve, we are disappointed that the Ohio House did not include a provision in the substitute bill to maintain the Public Library Fund (PLF) for Ohio's libraries at 1.7% of the General Revenue Fund (GRF).

Based on what is included in the substitute bill, libraries are being negatively impacted in several different ways:

- The PLF percentage is being cut from 1.7% to 1.66%.
- The base of the GRF will be negatively impacted by the 2% income tax cut.
- Libraries will automatically see a \$5 million deduction each fiscal year for the Ohio Public Library Information Network and the Library for the Blind.

In addition, libraries are not receiving any of the American Rescue Plan Act stimulus money for local governments directly from the federal government.

Now is not the time to cut funding for public libraries while the demand for services continues to rise. The fact that libraries saw a 33% increase in digital book circulation last year, combined with the cost of these materials which is often three to five times greater than the consumer price, greatly impacts library budgets. A reduction in funding will negatively affect libraries, especially those that 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.

Attached is a copy of our testimony on HB 110 before the House Finance Committee illustrating the important work of Ohio's libraries and how our state funding is utilized. Ohio's public libraries have the highest use per capita in the nation and for every one dollar we spend, over \$5 in value is returned to Ohioans. A primary reason for our success is the state funding we receive through the PLF.

Prior to voting the bill out of the House, **we urge you to consider amending the substitute bill and preserve the PLF at the current rate of 1.7%.**



**House Finance Committee
House Bill 110 Testimony
March 10, 2021**

Good morning, Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and members of the House Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill (HB) 110 on behalf of Ohio's public libraries.

My name is Michelle Francis and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Library Council. Joining me today for testimony is Jay Smith, OLC's Director of Government and Legal Services. The Ohio Library Council is the statewide association representing Ohio's 251 public library systems (rural, urban, and suburban) and the 8.4 million library cardholders they serve.

We are here to share our thoughts on certain provisions in the budget proposal related to the Public Library Fund (PLF) and we hope to give you a glimpse of the services provided to Ohioans throughout the pandemic by public libraries and how we can assist in Ohio's recovery efforts.

Based on state and national data, we know that Ohio's public libraries are extremely popular and in high demand with the highest use per capita in the nation. We have the highest percentage of registered borrowers, highest number of visits, and highest circulation. Libraries are open to all and a resource that Ohio's citizens increasingly turn to for vital services. Our success is dependent on the strong partnership between the State and the local library systems.

Library Services Throughout the Pandemic

Public library services are essential to the communities we serve. This was already evident pre-pandemic and became even more profound over the past year. Our members will always have books on the shelves, but our services today go far beyond books. We meet patrons where they are – if they are at home, at school or outside of our buildings. Libraries today provide a wide range of services to Ohio's citizens based on the needs of each individual community (see attachment A). In your local communities, we serve as a critical resource by providing connectivity to the Internet and computers for personal, employment and student use. Libraries provide wrap-around services through homework help centers (both virtual and in-person) and serve as feeding sites for both children and adults impacted by food insecurity. Ohioans utilize their local libraries for job search assistance, online training and to start small businesses.

In March 2020, our libraries quickly pivoted and adjusted their service delivery models to continue to meet the needs of their local communities. Here are just a few specific examples provided throughout the pandemic and continue today:

- 2020 Census outreach
- Polling locations
- Wi-Fi on library property
- Wi-Fi hot spots
- Digital resources (see attachment B)
- Online educational courses through LinkedIn Learning/Lynda.com
- Homework help/tutoring
- Tech assistance
- Food distribution and assistance
- Blood drives
- Outreach to seniors and nursing homes
- Job search assistance while Ohio Means Jobs Centers are closed
- Modernized lending of plexiglass and Zoom meeting rooms
- Tax services

In September 2020, we surveyed our members on their service levels and learned the following:

- 95% Offering curbside/drive-thru/delivery services
- 85% Providing virtual storytimes
- 75% Providing one-on-one training/tech tutor appointments
- 74% Actively partnering with schools to deliver services to students and parents
- 67% Providing job search assistance (including resume & interview help)
- 62% Added resources for homeschooling and remote learning
- 62% Loaning mobile Wi-Fi hot spots

Now that we have three vaccines in Ohio, our libraries are continuing to provide special COVID-19 related assistance:

- Partnering with local health centers to provide testing
- Distributing COVID-19 at-home test kits
- Sharing reliable information with our communities on the vaccine and promoting ODH town halls
- Assisting patrons with scheduling vaccine appointments
- Providing access to computers and the Internet so that hard to reach and underserved populations can make appointments for vaccinations

As we come out of the pandemic, Ohio's public libraries will be here to work with our schools to address the pandemic educational gaps we are seeing in Pre-K and Kindergarten as well as minority populations and economically disadvantaged communities. We will be here to assist in workforce development efforts to help displaced workers take online courses and apply for employment. We will still be here providing programming and lifelong learning opportunities for all ages. However, to continue these efforts, we will need resources.

Governor's Imagination Library

HB 110 funds the Governor's Imagination Library at \$8 million in each FY22 and FY23. As public libraries, we know the importance of early childhood literacy and laying the foundation for future success. Our members have both sponsored and promoted this program at the local level and we continue to support its efforts. We truly appreciate the Governor and Mrs. DeWine making literacy a priority and ensuring children ages 0-5 have access to the program.

Broadband

Ohio's public libraries recognized the need for broadband connectivity long before the pandemic. We know that a significant number of Ohioans still lack access to this basic utility. In 2019, Ohioans utilized public library computers more than 12.7 million times and our Wi-Fi more than 23.9 million times. We know that the digital divide and the need for access to broadband connectivity is real – we have not only the anecdotal stories to prove it, but the statistical data to support it. We are a strong proponent of HB 2 (and SB 8). We have been there each step of the way for prior proposals and we support the broadband provisions in HB 110. Many of you have heard Rep. Carfagna share the story of one of our libraries in southeast Ohio where 50% of their Wi-Fi usage was when the library was closed – that example came from our state budget testimony in 2019 and was pre-pandemic. Over the last year, the majority of our libraries had parking lots full of rows of cars utilizing the Wi-Fi for school, work and personal use. Some libraries even had individuals set up their own table with a computer and printer outside of the library and had food delivered while they were utilizing the library's Wi-Fi and electrical outlets outside of the building. The need for reliable broadband is real.

Public Library Fund

In HB 110, Ohio's public libraries are looking for revenue stability to respond to the needs of Ohio's citizens as the demand for services is continuing to increase. Keeping up with the growing demand for services is only possible with adequate funding. For example, in 2020, public libraries saw a 33% increase in digital book circulation (eBooks and audiobooks) over 2019. This significantly impacts budgets because of the increased cost associated with eBooks (see attachment C).

We would like to formally thank the General Assembly for your work over the last three budget cycles to begin to restore state funding to Ohio's public libraries through the Public Library Fund. Unfortunately, it is those efforts that are now in jeopardy under the Governor's proposal for FY22-23.

The Public Library Fund is not a line-item appropriation like the numerous programs and state agencies before you in HB 110. It is in permanent law and is a set percentage of the state's monthly tax receipts that go into the General Revenue Fund (GRF). It ebbs and flows each month depending on state revenues and is currently set in temporary law at 1.7% of the GRF for FY 2021.

The “As Introduced” version of HB 110 would reduce state funding to Ohio’s public libraries from 1.7% to 1.66% of the state’s GRF. In fact, our funding has not been set at this reduced rate since FY15. (see attachment D). Under the Governor’s proposal, OBM is estimating the PLF will decrease by 0.5% in FY22 and increase by 3.5% in FY23. However, these estimates are based on assumed growth in Ohio’s economy and the assumption that no additional policy changes will impact the GRF. Most often, libraries do not realize these estimates. Only once in the past seven years has the PLF met the estimates included in budget documents. (See attachment E).

It is also important to note that funding for both the Ohio Public Library Information Network (OPLIN) and the Library for the Blind are deducted from the PLF – these two important programs together account for about \$5 million each year, but artificially inflate the figures you see in the Blue Book.

State funding through the PLF is critically important because it remains a primary source of revenue for public libraries. Statewide, more than 48% of the total funding for Ohio’s public libraries comes from the state through the PLF. In addition, 20% 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 HB 110 proposes to reduce the PLF to the same rate as the Local Government Fund (LGF).

Conclusion

In conclusion, investing in public libraries is critical as the usage and demand for our services is growing and broadening – especially as we assist in Ohio’s recovery efforts. None of the services Michelle mentioned earlier would be possible without our state funding. Making public libraries a priority in this budget and maintaining the PLF at 1.7% is a step in the right direction. Because there are still several unknowns regarding Ohio’s economy and the budget process between now and June 30 that could impact the state’s GRF base (indirectly reducing the PLF), we are urging the Ohio House to keep the PLF at our current (FY21) rate of 1.7%.

The Ohio Library Council and Ohio’s public libraries look forward to working with you over the next few months as you work your way through the budget process. Thank you for your time and we will be more than happy to answer any questions.

Attachment A

Public libraries offer Ohioans a wide variety of programs, services, and materials based on the needs of their local community, including, but not limited to:

Examples of Lending

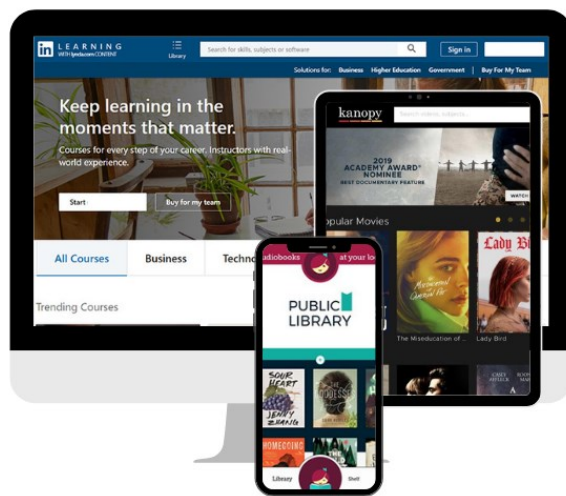
Personal Wi-Fi Devices
Tablets and iPads
Musical Instruments
Digital Materials (eBooks, eAudiobooks, etc.)
Artwork
Bicycles
Auto Code Readers
Tools (Air Quality Monitors/Energy Check)
Toys (Including Adaptive Toys)
Physical Books, Music, Movies
Kitchen Equipment
Memory Kits
Early Learning Kits
Telescopes
Board Games

Examples of Services

Wi-Fi
3-D Printers
Homework Help Centers
MakerSpaces
eGovernment Assistance
Income Tax Assistance/Tax Form Booklets
Job Search Assistance
Resume Assistance
Storytime
Food Service Program Feeding Sites
Musical & Theatrical Performances
Passport Services
Summer Reading Programs
Early Literacy Programs (Ready to Read)
Early Childhood Programs (Ready for Kindergarten)
Educational/Computer/Technology Programs/Classes
GED/ACT/SAT Test Preparation Programs
Meeting Room Space
Polling Locations & Training
Computers
Online Educational Courses



Use your library card to access these amazing resources!



Online Courses



ACT & SAT Test Prep



Books & Audiobooks



Magazines & News



Music



Movies



Visit [your library's website](#) for a full list of our digital resources and databases!

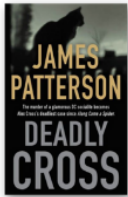
Digital Services

Name	Services Provided	Devices Supported
Flipster	Magazines	Computers Mobile Devices (App)
Freegal	Music	Computers Mobile Devices (App)
Hoopla	Books Audiobooks Comics Music Movies TV	Computers Mobile Devices (App)
Kanopy	Movies	Computers Mobile Devices (App)
Libby	Books Audiobooks Magazines	Mobile Devices (App)
LinkedIn Learning with Lynda.com content	Online Classes	Computers Mobile Devices (Browser)
Overdrive	Books Audiobooks Movies Magazines	Computers Mobile Devices (App)
PressReader	Newspapers Magazines	Computers Mobile Devices (App)
RBdigital	ACT & SAT Test Prep Movies TV	Computers Mobile Devices (App)

Attachment C

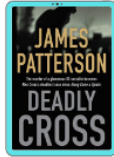
Library Pricing

Ohio's public libraries pay up to **5 times more** for eBooks. This greatly impacts library budgets and the number of items that can be purchased.



Print Edition

\$12.73



eBook on Amazon

\$14.99



eBook for Libraries

\$65

eBook expires after 24 months.



Public Library Fund (PLF) Distributions in Millions

Fiscal Year	PLF Percentage of GRF Taxes	PLF Distributions
2008	2.22%	\$418.2
2009	2.22%	\$414.2
2010	1.97%	\$340.6
2011	1.97%	\$367.6
2012	Freeze with 95% of Previous Year	\$352.2
2013	Freeze with 95% of Previous Year	\$344.3
2014	1.66%	\$341.0
2015	1.66%	\$360.5
2016	1.7%	\$377.6
2017	1.7%	\$378.5
2018	1.68%	\$384.6
2019	1.68%	\$402.8
2020	1.7%	\$393.1

Public Library Fund

LSC Estimates Included in Final State Budget Documents

FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020
\$359.3 Million	\$369.0 Million	\$389.5 Million	\$404.3 Million	\$386.3 Million	\$398.1 Million	\$422.3 Million

Actual Distributions

FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020
\$341.0 Million	\$360.5 Million	\$377.6 Million	\$378.5 Million	\$384.6 Million	\$402.8 Million	\$393.1 Million
- \$18 M	- \$8.5 M	- \$11.9 M	- \$25.8 M	- \$1.7 M	+ \$4.7 M	- \$29.2 M