



April 1, 2025

The Honorable Matt Huffman
Ohio House of Representatives
77 S. High St., 14th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Speaker Huffman:

As the statewide organization representing Ohio's 251 public library systems and their 7.4 million cardholders, we are writing to share our concerns on Substitute House Bill (Sub. HB) 96. It is important to remember that public libraries serve Ohioans of all ages, from birth to seniors.

Our partnership with the state has been in existence for almost 100 years as state funding has been provided to public library systems to deliver services to all Ohioans at the local level. Sub. HB 96 (the House's version of the Budget) would reduce state funding for Ohio's public libraries by more than \$100 million over the biennium. In addition, the new distribution formula would cut funding to public libraries in 39 counties on July 1. One single library system alone would receive a 30% cut in their state funding.

During yesterday's press conference, Chairman Stewart stated that state funding for public libraries is "outpacing inflation." This is simply not true. If state funding were adjusted for inflation, the Public Library Fund (PLF) would have received \$694.5 million in FY 2024 instead of \$489.3 million. For example, the PLF increased by 6.9% from FY07 through FY24 while inflation was 51.6% for that same period.

As stated in our testimony before the House Finance Committee, Ohio's public libraries already experienced a \$27 million loss in state funding in CY 2024 as compared to CY 2023. This resulted in libraries being funded at the same level they were 25 years ago.

Public libraries today save taxpayer dollars and put money back into the pockets of Ohioans. In 2024 alone:

- The Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library helped 1,200 patrons file taxes and saved them \$300,000 in filing fees. This resulted in just over \$1 million in refunds.
- A single library patron of the Tuscarawas County Public Library saved over \$2,000 last year by utilizing library services.
- The Toledo Lucas County Public Library Small Business and Nonprofit Services Team provided more than \$3.1 million in value to entrepreneurs and businesses through training, education, research services, meeting space and technology.

Most importantly, we know how much you appreciate history and museums. More than 59% of Ohio's public libraries save taxpayers and families money by lending museum, culture, discovery and activity passes. This makes quality family time and experiences affordable while encouraging people to stay in Ohio for travel. Passes are available for everything from zoos, art museums and science centers to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. This is extremely popular with families and provides real savings to taxpayers.

We know that for every \$1 spent by a public library, \$5 is returned to Ohioans.

Now is not the time to make additional cuts to libraries when the demand for services at the local level is growing and expanding, usage is increasing, and the rising cost of inflation can no longer be absorbed or ignored.

Ohioans love and use their public libraries. In 2023, Ohioans visited their local libraries more than 44.6 million times. That is the equivalent of 434 sold-out buckeye football games at Ohio Stadium (102,780 capacity). We know there has been lots of discussion about what is really happening in Ohio's public libraries today and the services being provided. Here is just a small snapshot:

- Services for ALL Students (Homeschoolers, Private, Charter and Public)
- Senior Services (Memory Cafes, Memory Kits, Social Security 101, Medicare 101)
- Early Childhood Literacy
- Homework Helpers and Tutoring
- Summer Learning Programs
- Workforce Development/Career Coaching
- Classes on Life Skills
- Broadband Connectivity
- Food Assistance

It is important to note that public libraries do not act "in loco parentis" and do not act in the place of a parent or guardian. Parents and guardians play a vital role in what their children are reading and have a right to determine what is best for their child.

This is what is really happening in Ohio's public libraries, and we have the data to prove it. These are the services that will have to be reduced or cut. Libraries cannot absorb any further losses or cuts in state funding. Sub. HB 96 will have a direct impact at the local level where the only option will be to cut services or place an additional property tax levy on the ballot.

We are urging the Ohio House to not cut state funding to Ohio's 7.4 million citizens that utilize public library services. We are urging you to restore the Public Library Fund.

Please feel free to stop by our Library Day at the Statehouse on April 8th in the Atrium and Rotunda where we will be showcasing the real services being provided through public libraries and requested by all Ohioans. As an update to our original invitation, we are now expecting about 325 public library trustees, directors and other library supporters from across the state.

Thank you again for your consideration and we would be more than happy to meet with you and your staff to discuss our concerns further.

Sincerely,



Michelle Francis
Executive Director

NEWS RELEASE

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Ohio House Budget Reduces Public Library Funding by \$100 Million

Columbus – The Ohio House introduced its version of the state budget, which includes cuts to funding for Ohio’s public libraries. The substitute bill introduced in the House Finance Committee proposes eliminating the Public Library Fund (PLF) in current law at the state level as it exists today.

“Ohio’s public libraries already experienced a \$27 million loss in state funding in Calendar Year (CY) 2024 as compared to CY 2023. This resulted in libraries being funded at the same level they were 25 years ago,” said Michelle Francis, executive director of the Ohio Library Council.

PLF CY 2023	\$510.18 million
PLF CY 2024	\$483.3 million
PLF FY 2024	\$489.3 million
PLF FY 2025*	\$530 million

*PLF Estimate from Ohio Office of Budget and Management

The House’s version of the budget would reduce state funding for Ohio’s public libraries by more than \$100 million over the biennium as compared to the Governor’s proposal. In addition, the new distribution formula would cut funding to public libraries in 39 counties on July 1.

Under Sub. House Bill 96, the Ohio House would allocate the following for public libraries:

- FY 2026 – \$485 million
- FY 2027 – \$495 million

In comparison, Governor DeWine’s proposed budget allocates the following to the PLF:

- FY 2026 – \$531.7 million
- FY 2027 – \$549.1 million

“Ohio’s public libraries have had a partnership with the state to deliver services at the local level for almost 100 years and that funding is now at risk. Public libraries serve all ages, and funding cuts of this magnitude could jeopardize the vital services that our communities rely on,” said Francis.

“Ohioans love and use their public libraries. They visited their local libraries more than 44.6 million times in 2023. That is the equivalent of 434 sold-out Buckeye football games at Ohio Stadium (102,780 capacity). We are committed to ensuring that all Ohioans continue to receive the support they need from their public libraries – everyone from young children to senior citizens. This reduction in funding is not in the best interest of Ohioans,” said Francis.

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