



**House Local Government Committee
House Bill 137
Opponent Testimony
October 15, 2025**

Chair King, Vice Chair Kishman, Ranking Member Sims, and members of the House Local Government Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 137 on behalf of Ohio's public libraries.

My name is Michelle Francis, and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Library Council (OLC), the statewide association representing Ohio's 251 public library systems (rural, urban, and suburban) and the 7.4 million library cardholders they serve.

In Ohio, public libraries are separate political subdivisions and are fiscally independent from city and county government. Each library system is governed by a board of trustees that is appointed by their appointing/taxing authority, depending on the type of system. Appointing authorities may include school boards, county commissioners, common pleas judges, city council, and township trustees. However, Ohio libraries are responsible for their own buildings and operations, and as public institutions, they must comply with Ohio's Open Meetings and Sunshine Laws.

Because of this autonomy, the Ohio Revised Code explicitly authorizes a board of library trustees to declare existing funds insufficient for library needs and allows for a process to submit a levy request to the voters in the library's service area. While all Ohio public libraries receive money from the state's Public Library Fund (PLF), the PLF now accounts for less than half of the total funding supporting libraries statewide.

Allowing local levy requests enables libraries to respond directly to the needs and demands of their local communities and allows voters to have a voice when it comes to local library services. Any changes to that funding structure could significantly impact the services provided locally.

If you speak with any library director around Ohio, going to the ballot to ask local taxpayers for money is the last thing they want to do. However, Ohioans value their local libraries and overwhelmingly support them at the ballot. In fact, over the past 15 years, 92% of Ohio public library levies have passed.

Additionally, library boundaries do not always match the boundaries of their taxing authority. This means there could be elected officials denying taxpayers the ability to

vote if they are outside of their jurisdiction. In many cases, public libraries have service area and taxing boundaries in multiple counties. Forty-two of Ohio's 251 public library systems have service area and taxing boundaries in more than one county, with some having service area in up to five counties.

Ohio is a local control state, and every library delivers services at the local level based on the needs of the local community. In your local communities, we serve as a critical resource for young people, students, families, adults, seniors, entrepreneurs, and small businesses. We educate, connect, and provide lifelong learning opportunities for success. Libraries do this while being good stewards of taxpayer dollars and sharing resources beyond boundaries through joint purchasing; and participating in consortia and pooling programs.

Thank you for your time. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.