



Stacey Russell
Executive Director, Muskingum County Library System
Written Testimony to the Ohio Local Government Committee
October 15, 2025

Chairwoman King, Vice Chair Kishman, Ranking Member Sims and members of the Local Government Committee, my name is Stacey Russell, and I am the Executive Director of the Muskingum County Library System. I served for 26 years as Fiscal Officer and the last 5 as Executive Director.

I would like to share concerns about House Bill 137 and its impact on public libraries.

- Under the Ohio Revised Code, Ohio's public library systems are separate, fiscally independent bodies/political subdivisions. Therefore, our budgets do not fall under city or county government.
- The bill undermines the principle of local control which is fundamental in Ohio local government. It takes away the ability for voters to decide the importance of supporting their local library through property taxes and who have consistently supported their local libraries through levies.
- Public libraries are accountable to taxpayers/voters. Over the past 15 years, 92% of Ohio Public Library Levies have passed. 203 of Ohio's 251 library systems (81%) have a levy and rely on that support to supplement their state funding.
- Because Ohio public libraries do not receive state funding for capital improvements or repairs, libraries often build cash reserves to fund capital expenses or future emergencies. Revenue from the State of Ohio for public libraries has been eroded. This bill will increase unpredictability in revenue. Unpredictability in revenue will make it difficult to budget for staffing, programs or capital expenditures.
- The bill will give the taxing authorities the ability to override decisions made by local library boards while not taking responsibility for providing for the operations of the library.

I urge you to carefully consider the impact and potential consequences of removing the decision-making power from voters and library boards, and instead placing it in the hands of a taxing authority.