



COLUMBUS METROPOLITAN LIBRARY

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Mr. Chairman, members of the House Finance Committee, I am Cindy Hilsheimer. I am the President of the Columbus Metropolitan Library Board of Trustees and the proud owner of a small business -- SC Search Consultants. I am honored to represent Ohio's 251 public libraries at this hearing today.

Let me begin by addressing the issue:

Governor Taft's budget, as currently proposed, will have a significant impact on library funding in Ohio.

I am concerned that libraries are viewed too often as simply a place to borrow a good book.

Borrowing a book is only one example of the value libraries bring to the communities they serve. For example:

Story time programs for new parents help establish the habits and behaviors that result in literate children and productive citizens.

Teen programs and homework support programs help children succeed in school and grow to responsible adults.

Adult and senior outreach programs demystify computer technology and provide critical access to information... for far too many, the only access they have.

The investment that Ohio has made in its library system has produced consistent returns.

OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) of Columbus has even put a number on it -- stating that libraries yield, on average, a 400% return on investment -- \$4.00 in return for every tax dollar invested.

And that's a conservative estimate.

Libraries are an investment, not a liability.

And these new proposed funding cuts come at a time when demand for library services is growing.

Our Franklin County customers visit often – in fact, nearly 13 million times a year.

According to OCLC, five times more people visit public libraries each year than attend all professional and college sports events combined – libraries experience March Madness all year long.

Just like legislators, our libraries are responsible to a large constituent base – our 800,000 registered borrowers in Franklin County represent 70% of the population. Can you imagine a corporation with that level of market share?

And they are a happy constituency. Statewide surveys tell us that public libraries are the most popular of public services, with an approval rating of over 86%.

I'd like to give you just one example of why approval ratings are so high.

Our Summer Reading Club in Franklin County registered over 70,000 children last year, an unbelievable 57% of the eligible Columbus Public Schools elementary school students.

Here's what one mother had to say about the Summer Reading Club...

“If it were not for the programs such as the Summer Reading Program and classes offered throughout the year to our children they would be hard-pressed to find other facilities in the neighborhood that offer as much as the library. As an adult student and mother my family utilizes the library often and I am thankful that such a service is available.”

Summer Reading Clubs are an excellent example of collaboration between libraries and local institutions.

Together, libraries work to ensure the best possible service for the communities we serve. Individually,

we work within our communities to be strong assets, offering support to all groups – children, students, parents, teachers, seniors, business people – providing the resources and programs they need to ensure their success.

However.... this valuable, much appreciated, highly utilized, collaborative institution is at risk. Governor Taft's budget, as currently proposed, will have a serious impact on libraries in this state.

First, as you know, Ohio public libraries are funded either in part or totally by state income tax – the LLGSF. Since 2001, the amount of the LLGSF allocated to libraries has been reduced by nearly 10%. The current budget proposes an additional 5% reduction – representing the third consecutive biennium budget reduction in LLGSF funding.

Secondly, the governor's tax reform plan would result in an overall reduction in state income tax revenue of 21% over the next five years – directly resulting in an additional 21% reduction in library funding.

Thirdly, some libraries supplement state income with a local property tax levy. The Governor's proposal to eliminate the tangible personal property tax portion of local levies could further reduce library funding up to 20%.

The bottom line: Ohio libraries could face a 25% or higher reduction in revenue if all of the Governor's proposals are approved.

That's not acceptable.

We urge you to take the time to fully understand the combined impact of all these reductions on library services. We ask that you work with us to establish a stable funding base, now and into the future.

Twenty years ago, we developed an efficient and effective library funding mechanism that has allowed Ohio's public libraries to be among the best in the nation. We established a partnership between local and state government, based on the sound logic that local funding provided the most efficient and effective results. Libraries in the state of Ohio took that partnership seriously and returned the state's investment four fold.

We believe that it is now time for this legislature to work again with the public libraries to develop a plan that allows our libraries to sustain its level of excellence for the next twenty years.

In Closing:

Public libraries are asking the legislature to consider the following:

#1 Continue the current level of public library funding, instead of the 5% reduction proposed.

#2 Establish a legislative and local government committee to develop a stable, reliable and permanent funding source that allows for some growth for libraries and local governments.

#3 Please remember that we are part of the solution.

I appreciate your time and attention this morning. With me today are Patrick Losinski, Director of the Columbus Metropolitan Library and Lynda Murray with the Ohio Library Council, who will help me answer any questions that you might have.