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Public Library Funding Cut in New State Budget

The Ohio General Assembly's conference committee on the 2010-2011 state budget today accepted a proposal to cut Ohio's Public Library Fund (PLF) \$84.3 million over the next two years. The cut is substantially less than the approximate \$227.3 million cut proposed by Gov. Ted Strickland on June 19 but will still have a significant impact on the services provided by Ohio's public libraries.

"The Ohio Library Council acknowledges the countless hours and hard work by the members of the General Assembly and their staff to reach this agreement," according to Doug Evans, Executive Director, Ohio Library Council. "Ohio's public libraries have the citizens of Ohio to thank for exerting extraordinary influence on their elected representatives in the Ohio General Assembly to minimize the cuts to library funding. We believe the overwhelming groundswell of public support convinced the legislature to reject the Governor's massive cuts, and attempt to preserve library funding as much as possible during this challenging financial situation."

The budget cuts, combined with the precipitous drop in the PLF in the first six months of this year as a result of declining state tax revenues, will result in library funding dropping as much as 25-30% in 2009 as compared to calendar year 2008. The decreased funding comes at a time when Ohio's public libraries are experiencing an unprecedented increase in the demand for services. Regardless, libraries will be looking at all available options to stretch financial resources, including discontinuing some programs, cutting hours, reducing staff, closing branches, or merging services with other library systems.

Revenue to the PLF began dropping significantly in October 2008. In July 2009, public libraries received 22% less funding than they received in July 2008. It is expected that based just on the formula, public libraries will likely receive close to 20% less money in 2009 than they did in 2008. Although Ohio's economy is faltering along with that of rest of the country, public libraries believed that they could withstand those reductions through layoffs, reduced material purchases, and reduction in operating hours. An additional cut of 11% will be difficult to manage by some libraries.

Public libraries, especially Ohio's public libraries, provide outstanding services to so many people. In these hard times, more and more people turn to their public library for books to read, homework help centers, help in finding a job, computer access, programs on how to deal with bankruptcy and foreclosures, programs on early literacy for their small children. Through e-mails and phone calls to legislators and the Governor, patrons told those life stories and how Ohio's public libraries have made a difference.

"This is a budget with which no one can be happy, but we appreciate the Ohio General Assembly's effort to restore \$143 million to the Public Library Fund," Evans commented. "This bill means that Ohio's public libraries will not face cuts that could have amounted to 50% of previous funding. However, depending upon the accuracy of the projections made by the Ohio Department of Taxation, libraries could still be looking at cuts that could be as much as 30%."

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The mission of the Ohio Library Council is to serve as an advocate for Ohio's public libraries and to provide opportunities for education and growth to the library community. The Ohio Library Council represents the 251 public library systems in Ohio and more than 4,500 staff, Friends, and trustees who work or volunteer at Ohio public libraries.

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