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Strickland's Proposal Could Result in Widespread Public Library Closures

Governor Strickland's proposal to permit slot machines covered the front pages of Ohio's newspapers this past weekend. However, the real gamble he's taking is his drastic cuts to Ohio's public library funding that could force the closure of many of Ohio's public libraries and branches in neighborhoods and communities in every county in the state.

The Ohio Library Council (OLC) condemns a proposal by Governor Ted Strickland to balance the state's budget by raiding public library funding. His plan singled out the state's Public Library Fund for cuts far beyond the relative reductions in state revenues and is *more than double* the reductions projected by the Ohio Department of Taxation.

Analysis shows that the Strickland budget cuts would reduce library funding by at least 47% in fiscal year 2010 and 45% in fiscal year 2011 as compared to the fiscal year 2008 distributions. During the same 2010-2011 budget years, the state projects the General Revenue Fund will fall 18% and 16% respectively. The Governor is recommending cuts to public libraries that far exceed the state's drop in revenue.

"Our libraries have been slashing their budgets for months to find ways to maintain library services with a 20% reduction in state dollars," according to Scott Shafer, President of the Ohio Library Council and Director of the Lima Public Library. "Reductions of this magnitude will force libraries to close completely, close branches, and/or drastically cut hours and services – beginning July 1."

In the last biennium budget, the OLC supported the proposal to fund Ohio's libraries with 2.2% of taxes paid to the state. In the past eight years, these revenues have declined – most dramatically since January 2009. So far, since January 2009, public libraries have lost 20% of their state revenue. Governor Strickland's proposed 30% reduction is in addition to that loss.

The Governor's proposed funding cuts come at a time when Ohio's public libraries are experiencing unprecedented increases in demand for services. In every community throughout the state, Ohioans are turning to their public libraries for free high speed Internet to access information on employment opportunities, children and teens are beginning summer reading programs, and people of all ages are turning to the library for information and education.

The OLC encourages all Ohioans to contact the Governor's office to express their opposition to his proposal to cut library funding, and to urge their legislators to reject the Governor's plan.

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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.