

**Testimony of Jennifer Thompson**  
**Director, The Chillicothe and Ross County Public Library**  
**Senate Finance Committee – May 12, 2005**

Senator Carey and Members of the Committee: I am Jennifer Thompson, Director of the Chillicothe and Ross County Public Library. Thank you for allowing me to speak today in reference to the Library and Local Government Support Fund, on behalf of public libraries all over Ohio.

Ohio has wonderful public libraries—forward-thinking, technologically sophisticated, ready to try new methods for everything from checking out books to saving money with group purchases and cooperative agreements. The libraries have been good stewards of the public's dollars. In the late 90's, when the economy was roaring, libraries like mine invested in capital improvements or set money aside in building funds. In the lean times we are seeing now, those funds have been emptied as library leaders try to soften the effects of budget cuts on library users. The Sunday hours that are popular with working families have been curtailed in many localities because libraries save the most money by closing those hours. Most libraries in the southeast region have now been forced to drop the Books by Mail service based in Wellston which has served poor, rural, and disabled individuals for the last twenty-five years in some of Ohio's poorest and most rural counties.

Ohio's residents enjoy the best public libraries in the nation. We have the highest circulation, highest number of reference questions, the highest number of patron visit.

We have been able to achieve this level of success because of a long-standing partnership

between the state and public libraries. There are other places in the country where there is more local money spent per capita on public libraries, but, because Ohio provides more state money for public libraries, Ohio provides excellent library service in more affluent communities like Rocky River as well as in our less affluent communities like Vinton and Morgan Counties. We believe Ohio is proud of this long standing tradition of outstanding library service for all our residents, regardless of their economic status.

In my thirty years of working in public libraries in Ohio, I have been impressed by how conservative library trustees and librarians tend to be in spending the public's money for library service. You don't see financial mismanagement, you don't see out of control spending, and you do see a mentality of setting something aside for a rainy day.

Unfortunately, we all know that it's been raining on Ohio's economic fortunes for four straight years now. Librarians in small and large towns all over Ohio are helping the people weather hard times—by pointing that bright high school senior to college scholarship information, by having Morningstar and the Wall Street Journal for the retirees who come in every morning to check their investments, by providing free Internet service to myriads of job seekers, by helping the fifth grader get his homework done after school while Mom is still at work.

Library trustees and librarians know that we have to hang in and do our best to help Ohio citizens until times get better. We are asking that you help us

- 1) by continuing the current freeze on public library funding rather than the proposed 5% reduction;
- 2) by instituting a trigger mechanism in the budget that would allow for some distribution to local governments of any unanticipated growth in state revenue

- 3) by establishing a Local Government Fund Committee that includes representatives from local government organizations, libraries, and the Ohio General Assembly to work on developing a long-term strategy to fund libraries and local governments;
- 4) by permanently holding harmless libraries and local governments from the proposed elimination of the tangible personal property tax;
- 5) by ensuring that all public library materials and services continue to be free for Ohio citizens, removing budget language that allows usage fees for non-print materials or services including reference questions, summer reading programs, Internet access, books on tape, and other audio-visual materials.

Thank you for allowing me to meet with you today and present this information. I am happy to answer any questions that you might have.