

OHIO LIBRARY COUNCIL
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Special Meeting Via Zoom
April 16, 2025
4:00 P.M.

PRESENT	Kathy Bach, Cincinnati Monica Baughman, Worthington Travis Bautz, Middletown Julianne Bedel, Medina Sarah Clevidence, Findlay Kim DeNero-Ackroyd, Cleveland Heights Mary Ellen Icaza, Canton Sandra Hedlund Tunnell, Ashland Elizabeth Muether, Celina Bernie Rochford, Akron Stacey Russell, Zanesville
ABSENT	Robbie Jenkins, Gallipolis William Rutger, Avon Lake
GUESTS	Dr. Howard Fleeter, Howard Fleeter & Associates
STAFF	Michelle Francis, Executive Director Jeanine D'Andrea, Director, Membership Services Angie Jacobsen, Director, Communications Jay Smith, Director of Government and Legal Services
CALL TO ORDER	The meeting was called to order by Chair Icaza at 4:08 p.m. Francis thanked the Board for being available on short notice and their quick response to the meeting. She noted that Dr. Howard Fleeter is joining the meeting to provide background information to the Board and answer their questions. OLC has worked with Dr. Fleeter for 20+ years. He worked with OLC as a part of Levin, Driscoll and Fleeter, and we have had a long-respected relationship.
FY 2026-2027 STATE BUDGET	<p>Francis and Smith gave an overview of the House version of the State Budget.</p> <p><u>Funding.</u> House Bill 96, as passed by the Ohio House, proposes a major shift in how the state funds public libraries. Instead of allocating a fixed 1.7% of the state's General Revenue Fund (GRF) to the Public Library Fund (PLF) — as established in permanent law — the PLF would now receive a specific line-item appropriation.</p> <p>This change removes the PLF's current protection under state law and makes it more vulnerable to funding cuts or even elimination in future budgets. Notably, the Local Government Fund (LGF) would continue and would receive 1.75% of the GRF, as recommended by the Governor — highlighting a concerning inconsistency.</p> <p>The House line-item appropriation includes \$490 million in FY 2026 and \$500 million in FY 2027. However, this proposal still falls \$90.8 million short of Governor DeWine's plan over the biennium. The governor raised the PLF to 1.75% of the General Revenue Fund (GRF) in his state budget proposal.</p>

The \$490 million the House is proposing in FY 2026 is less than:

- Ohio House estimated PLF distribution in FY 2025 of \$493.4 million
- Ohio Office of Budget and Management estimated PLF distribution in FY 2025 of \$530 million
- Governor's proposal and estimate in FY 2026 of \$531.7 million

OPLIN and Library for the Blind Funding.

Currently, funding for OPLIN and the Library for the Blind (totaling about \$4.9 million/year) is deducted directly from the PLF. The House budget shifts this responsibility to the General Revenue Fund.

Distribution. The formula the House originally proposed would have cut state funding to 93 library systems in 39 counties on July 1. The final version of the House bill changed the distribution formula back to the formula as it exists in current law. With that, there is no new money. This is not an increase related to inflation. No longer deducting OPLIN and library for the blind from the PLF.

Next Steps. House Bill 96 has now advanced to the Ohio Senate, where legislators will begin crafting their version of the state budget.

OLC is calling on the Ohio Senate to restore the Public Library Fund to 1.75% of the General Revenue Fund, as proposed in Governor DeWine's budget.

FRANKLIN-SPRINGBORO
PUBLIC LIBRARY

On April 11, OLC staff received an email from library directors in Warren County expressing their recommendations for changing the PLF distribution formula. Franklin-Springboro Public Library, in Warren County, has not been an Institutional Member of OLC since 2009.

Franklin-Springboro, Plain City, and Bettsville are the only 3 public library systems in the state of Ohio who are not Institutional Members of OLC. On April 15, the director of the Franklin-Springboro Public Library distributed an email to other public library directors across the state encouraging them to sign on to a letter asking the Senate to address a new distribution formula. OLC staff notified the OLC Board and shared the email that had been distributed across the state. Francis reminded Board members the state budget is a process, and many things can change.

PLF DISTRIBUTION

Francis thanked Dr. Fleeter for joining the Board meeting. Fleeter gave an overview of the history of the PLF and previous studies and reports. The OLC 2009 report was done due to concerns from Franklin-Springboro Public Library. There was a study done by the Task Force on Local Government Reform with 7 appendices; and an Ohio Library Survey Commission from 1947. There have also been studies at the county level. Fleeter did a report for Cuyahoga County Libraries. Anytime there's been a study at the state or county level, libraries have looked at multiple measures. Circulation, square footage, poverty, local property tax effort, etc. Ohio is different from other states. We have library boundaries that cover more than just one county. Some go up to 4 or 5 counties.

Under any of the previous formulas, there was much more money than there was now. The problem is not OLC making their case, it is the state not upholding their commitment.

2000 was the last year we had an equalization. Once the money started to dry up at the state level, it meant there was no excess to go into the equalization process. Overall, the formula we had in place is not flawed, it just hasn't been funded at the correct rate.

Francis noted the GRC and Legislative Network is meeting tomorrow to discuss this.

Fleeter noted we've only been thinking about this for 2 weeks. The first step is to stop this bad thing and the second step is to think about ways to make changes without unduly hurting others.

Muether asked if the history of the distribution was available. Francis noted the history of funding is on the website, and the formula for distribution is in a Fleeter report from 2009. Francis will be sure to share that.

Icaza thanked Francis for pulling this all together and appreciated Fleeter being here to explain things. She knows there is a lot happening and wants to be sure the Board is supporting the OLC staff and the organization.

After much discussion it was the sense of the Board to send a letter to Ohio's public library directors with the message of unity and a commitment to study the PLF distribution formula. While our immediate focus must be restoring the PLF, we recognize that there are questions and concerns about the current PLF distribution formula that need to be addressed. Once the current state budget process is complete, the OLC Board is committed to establishing an institutional member-driven study to review the formula thoroughly.

NEXT MEETING

The Board is scheduled to meet again on April 25, 2025 at 1:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

With there being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting adjourned at 5:56 p.m.