



Written Testimony to Senate Finance Committee for Thursday June 5, 2025

Chairman Cirino and distinguished members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Cheryl Kuonen; I am the Director of the Mentor Public Library in Lake County. It is an honor to speak to you today about the vital role Mentor Public Library plays in the community.

As background I have worked in various Ohio public libraries for the last 28 years. During that time, I have seen many changes – and almost all of them positive. To give some perspective:

- I was there when the library moved from paper card catalogs to an online database.
- I was there when the library received its first Gates computer for the public to use.
- And I was there when libraries were funded by the LLGSF (Library and Local Government Support Fund)!
- And in 2018 I was director of Mentor Public Library when we joined Clevnet, a consortium of 47 library systems that provides shared access to over 12 million items. In May 2022 Howard Fleeter and Associates conducted a return on investment on Clevnet and found that “member libraries received more than \$19 of benefit for every \$1 of cost of participating in the consortium.”

<https://www.clevnet.org/what-is-clevnet/>

Throughout that time public libraries have always been about early literacy and the love of reading. We have always known the importance of early literacy skills for success and recognize its importance today.

At Mentor Public Library, story times are held at all our locations on various days and times to meet the needs of our community. At our main location, it's commonplace to have 50 or more attend a story time. All our story time staff have been trained in early literacy skills and share that knowledge with parents, grandparents, and guardians.

Our staff also conduct outreach story times at daycares and preschools. We currently visit 15 facilities and conduct over 40 story times a month at those locations.

We offer Kindergarten Readiness bags and programming to help prepare kids for school, as well as early literacy backpacks with books, activities and guides for young learners.

Our Summer Reading program began on Friday and we had almost 100 attend the kickoff program. **As of Tuesday, we had more than 600 children registered in 6 days!** Annually Mentor Public Library sees about 1500 children participate in Summer Reading.

On Monday, a grandparent visiting her grandkids commented that we have the “best Children’s Department in the United States!” Our staff are trained to help families find the right books for them.

Part of our job as a librarian is to set aside our personal beliefs and serve everyone in our community equally. It doesn’t matter what I think personally. Our job is to ask ‘does it meet the needs of someone in our community’? We work hard to ensure that there’s something for everyone at our library and that everyone receives excellent service.

The public library also provides a location for individuals and families to gather socially. As one of our patrons recently stated the library “is your starting point” to “all the things happening in the community.”

Our library also recently assisted a patron with an online medical appointment. He came into the library saying that his doctor made an online appointment for him, but he had no idea what to do. Our staff walked him through downloading the app, and they showed him how to use it. Staff reserved a quiet study room and helped him login to the appointment when it was time. What would this patron have done if our library wasn’t there to help him?

Our library partners with many organizations to help share information with the community. We work with the Alzheimer’s Association, NAMI, Rape Crisis Center, MRDD, and AARP tax help to name a few. We currently partner with Lakeland Community College’s Women in Technology to offer free one-on-one device help to patrons. This has been very well received.

I am a rule follower and follow the laws. But it is unclear on how to follow or implement section 3375.47 regarding placing material related to ‘sexual orientation or gender identity or expression in a portion of the library that is not primarily open to view of persons under the age of eighteen.’ My Headlands branch is 1,100 square feet and an open square. How do I implement this language? The Library employs high schoolers as shelveers, and they are in all parts of the building. How do I implement this language

with my minor staff? Will staff have to read every book and keep written notes of any references? Will this pull them from service to the public?

I believe the library is here to help people achieve their goals, whatever they may be. Continuing to invest in public libraries is an investment in the success of individuals and our community.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I invite anyone to reach out to me with any questions or a tour of any of our locations.

Respectfully,

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