



Good morning, Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Minority Member Liston, and members of the Senate Health Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on House Bill (HB) 96 on behalf of Ohio's public libraries. My name is Chris May and I am the Director/Fiscal Officer of the Mansfield/Richland County Public Library. MRCPL is just one of Ohio's 251 public library systems (rural, urban, and suburban). We serve over 70,000 of the 7.4 million Ohio library cardholders. I would like to share my thoughts on the budget proposal related to public libraries and give you a glimpse of the services provided to our community and how Ohio's libraries serve Ohioans, particularly our senior population.

We meet patrons where they are – if they are at home, at school, at assisted living facilities and nursing homes, or outside of our buildings. Libraries today provide a wide range of services to Ohio's seniors based on the unique needs of each individual community. We serve as a critical resource by providing connectivity to the Internet and computers for personal, employment and student use. Such service is provided by wireless connectivity around our locations, computers (with one-on-one assistance) inside our libraries, and checking out Wi-Fi hotspots for use at home. We serve as free meal sites for those impacted by food insecurity. Our patrons utilize their local libraries for job search assistance, online training and to start small businesses.

Here are just a few specific examples of how our library provided service to our community in 2024:

- 90,000+ patrons attended children's, teen, and adult programming.
- 485,000+ patrons visited our nine library locations, which is a 6% increase over 2023.
- Over 1.5 million items were checked out to library patrons. We experienced a 20% increase in circulation of digital materials as compared to 2023.
- MRCPL provides a Memory Lab in which customers can bring in their old home videos and audio tapes to convert into a digital format. The Memory Lab is a space for the community to digitize and preserve a variety of audio/visual media formats. Customers have access to knowledgeable staff who explain how to operate the equipment and digitize the material. We currently offer seventeen different formats, with VHS and 8mm reels being the most popular. In the last twelve months, the library has scheduled 110 appointments for 60 different individuals. Preserving these memories is appreciated by customers of all ages.
- Lending Wi-Fi hot spots, power tools, puzzles/games, literacy kits, memory kits, and more in our Library of Things.
- The Library's Memory Kits were launched last year for those who care for someone with Alzheimer's or Dementia. Each Memory Kit is a themed collection of materials that help individuals reminisce and create meaningful conversations. Materials include a variety of tactile objects, digital media, activities, and conversation starters. Kits also include resources to support caregivers and suggest ideas for ways to interact and connect.

- MRCPL saw an approximate 30% increase in usage of electronic materials in 2024. eBooks and eAudiobooks offer many options for those with vision and hearing impairments to still enjoy their reading material.
- Online educational courses through LinkedIn Learning & Northstar Digital Literacy. Many seniors who are re-entering the workforce rely upon these courses to learn new skills. Our Learning Lab staff provide services both in-house and to local businesses for those workers looking to increase their skills.
- Our programming related to health and wellness, crafts, and utilizing technology is heavily used by our older adult population.
- We provide services to our residents of nursing homes and assisted living facilities. This goes beyond transactions, as our staff builds relationships with these residents. Our staff assist older adults in using technology, such as computers and cell phones, provide creative programming, and, perhaps most importantly, someone to talk to.
- Our Books by Mail service provides materials through US mail, for free, to residents who cannot leave their homes due to health-related issues.
- MRCPL collaborates with the State Library of Ohio, Cleveland Public Library and the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled to provide Talking Books. Eligible customers may checkout free recorded books, magazines and playback equipment to approximately 11,000 eligible blind, visually-impaired, print-disabled and reading-disabled Ohio residents.
- A member of our staff is certified in Braille transcription through the Library of Congress and National Federation of the Blind. She has transcribed our downtown Mansfield StoryWalk, menus for local restaurants, lyrics for choir music, and for a display at a neighboring public library.

Our usage has remained high and the demand for services has only increased. Despite that increase in demand, Ohio's libraries received the same amount of funding as 25 years ago. Unlike other local governments, we do not receive city income tax, county sales tax, ARPA funds, inside millage, casino revenue, or facilities funding through the capital budget. To meet the needs of the rising costs of print and electronic materials, building needs and maintenance (MRCPL maintains ten buildings with several in need of major renovation or replacement), programming materials, and vehicles/materials for our outreach customers, we urge the Senate to adopt Governor DeWine's proposal of moving the Public Library Fund to 1.75% in the biennial budget.

Thank you for your time.

Chris May

Director/Fiscal Officer