

## Written testimony to Senate Finance Committee for May 30, 2025

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and esteemed members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Jason Kucsma and I am the Executive Director/Fiscal Officer of the National Medal Award-Winning Toledo Lucas County Public Library (TLCPL).

Industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie is credited for saying “**a library outranks any other one thing a community can do to benefit its people**. It is a never-failing spring in the desert.” It is an honor to have the opportunity to share with you why Ohio's public libraries are one of the best investments you can make in the future of Ohio's communities.

An Ohio native, I left the state for a decade to work with libraries in New York City and across the country before returning to take the deputy director role at Toledo Lucas County Public Library. In my experience, I can tell you that **Ohio's public libraries are—without hyperbole—the gold standard for public library excellence in the country**. That is due in large part to the more than 100-year partnership Ohio's libraries have had with the State to provide statewide support for *all* public libraries.

Whether they are small, medium, large, urban, suburban, or rural, **Ohio public libraries are actively engaged in listening to and responding to community needs** with programs, services, and partnerships that put public libraries at the center of successful communities.

In Lucas County alone, over 300,000 individuals hold a library card. In a spring 2024 survey, 5,000 residents gave the Library a 92% satisfaction rate, with our 2022 operational levy receiving 72% voter approval. Not only do Ohio libraries see high satisfaction, but also significant utilization with a return on investment. Last year in Lucas County alone, we saw more than 2 million visits, circulated more than 3 million items, and hosted more than 80,000 attendees at youth and adult programs.

For every \$1 invested in Ohio's libraries, we return \$5 in benefits. Additionally, 7.4 million Ohio residents, or more than 60% of the state's population, hold a library card, and they use it more than any other state (outside of California). Ohio public libraries had 44.6 million visits in 2023 and saw materials borrowed or downloaded 175.7 million times.

At Toledo Lucas County Public Library, our Small Business and Nonprofit Services Department returned \$3.1 million in valued services, training, and education to help community members start or grow a business or nonprofit organization. **Not only do public libraries improve a community's quality of life, but they are also centers of economic innovation.**

I mentioned that we do our work in the public library in conversation, so to speak, with our communities. This is how we know which partners and partner services our community benefits from using library spaces to expand their reach. At TLCPL, **scores of institutions use the taxpayer-funded library infrastructure as a network of locations that allow them to expand their reach and help individuals who might not otherwise be able to or interested in visiting those partners' primary locations.** You need not look further than our partnerships with Mercy Health, ProMedica, and University of Toledo Health to see community nurses and practitioners providing life-saving and life-improving services out of a neighborhood branch to community members who may have one or more barrier to accessing those services elsewhere.

Just as our programs and services reflect and meet community needs and interests, so too does our collection of books, movies, music, television shows and more. Our longstanding collection development policies guide us in building a collection of vetted materials our professional staff know will resonate with the communities we serve. It is worth noting that the same policy defines a process for community members to request reconsideration of certain titles we may have in the collection. **TLCPL has received no formal requests for reconsideration for several years now.** The House Bill contains language that would require libraries to place materials related to sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression in a portion of the library that is not primarily open to the view of minors. Not only is this impractical, it is an incomprehensibly expensive solution in search of a problem.

For these reasons and so many more, **we are respectfully asking for this committee's reaffirmed commitment to the 100-year partnership between Ohio libraries and the legislature.** Please support amendment number SC1236 to restore the Governor's proposal to increase the Public Library Fund to 1.75% and amendment number SC1542, which removes the proposed language on library materials.

Strong public libraries help build a strong Ohio, and we are grateful for your consideration.