



## Puskarich Public LIBRARY SYSTEM

### **HB 96 Testimony in Support of restoring the Public Library Fund to the Governor's proposal of 1.75% of the GRF**

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Chairwoman Manchester, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Weinstein, and Members of the Senate Oversight & Reform Committee; Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of public libraries. Ohio's public libraries are grateful to Gov. DeWine for raising the Public Library Fund (PLF) to 1.75% of the General Revenue Fund (GRF) in his state operating budget proposal for FY 26-27. I am asking for your support to restore the Governor's proposal.

My name is Sandi Thompson, and I am Director of the Puskarich Public Library System in Harrison County. I'm here to share my deep understanding of Ohio's public libraries as one of our State's greatest assets—an essential part of our information and social infrastructure. Libraries are not just buildings filled with books. They are dynamic community centers where lives are improved every day through connection, learning, and support.

Our librarians are often the first place someone turns to in a time of need. Here are just a few examples of what that looks like in our libraries:

- A librarian helped someone purchase a bus ticket online so their family member could escape an abusive situation.
- After a hurricane destroyed her home in Florida, a patron's daughter was devastated to lose her high school yearbooks. We were able to direct her to our digitized yearbook collection, and she was able to reprint them.
- Each year, people come to us for tax assistance. We partner with tax volunteers and provide hundreds of printed forms—city, state, and federal.
- Veterans, who make up nearly 7% of Harrison County's population, rely on us every day—for computer help, reading the paper, and more in-depth support:
  - One gentleman worked with our staff over several days to secure his VA benefits and arrange travel for his physician visits.

- A veteran who lost everything in a house fire was able to have a photo of himself in uniform recreated from our digitized local newspaper archive.
- At our Scio Branch, staff assist a 94-year-old Army veteran with his pacemaker check every month.

These are not rare moments. These are everyday moments at Ohio libraries.

As Chair of Harrison County's Regional Planning Commission's Broadband Committee, I also understand the realities of limited internet access in geographically disadvantaged rural Ohio. In our hilly, spread-out county, affordable and reliable broadband is hard to come by. Our four library locations are the only free public Wi-Fi access points in their communities.

You'll often see people sitting in our parking lots at all hours just to access a signal. Local businesses come in to upload large files that they can't send from their own networks. We are circulating 22 new upgraded hotspots this June to meet growing demand. We even partnered with our County Commissioners and ODOT to install a 5G wireless internet on a MARCS tower—supporting both rural residents and our local rural transit service.

And we're not just providing access—we're teaching the skills. We offer regular computer classes on digital literacy, from the basics to advanced topics like 3D printing and studio software.

Despite being a small county with just over 14,000 people, 11,669 individuals attended our library programs in 2024.

We also lead the state with 79% of eligible children enrolled in Ohio's Dolly Parton Imagination Library—because in Harrison County, reading is still a priority.

And when the new consolidated, countywide school opened without its own library, we stepped in. We are now the library for those children. We are overseen by local people who care deeply, and we are stretching every dollar to maintain this high level of service.

Some people still think libraries are just about books. I invite you to visit Harrison County and see firsthand: libraries are so much more.

They are hubs of resilience, opportunity, and dignity. They are one of the best investments this State can make.

I urge you to continue your support for restoring the Public Library Fund to the Governor's proposal of 1.75% of the GRF, so that libraries across Ohio—rural and urban, large and small—can keep doing the quiet, powerful work of helping your constituents: your neighbors, your families, your veterans, your children.

Let's continue to celebrate what Ohio's libraries are doing—and ensure they have the support to keep doing even more.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.