



Testimony regarding Am. Sub. HB 96

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Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 96 on behalf of the Findlay-Hancock County Public Library (FHCPL).

I am Sarah Clevidence, Director of the Findlay-Hancock County Public Library. Our library is the largest system serving Hancock County, with a service area population of approximately 66,400. We operate a main library, one branch and a bookmobile that visits the smaller communities in our service area.

In 2024, FHCPL circulated over 1 million items. We welcomed nearly 210,000 visitors. Those patrons took part in library programs (56,458), asked questions (78,501), used the public computers (16,049) and logged in to the library's wi-fi (17,618).

Resource Sharing

Ohio has a long history of state support through the Public Library Fund as a percentage of the General Revenue Fund. This history of library support has led to robust resource sharing among Ohio's Public Libraries. I would like to share three examples that benefit FHCPL's patrons.

First, FHCPL is part of the Serving Every Ohioan consortium. This consortium is made up of over 100 public library systems in Ohio. When patrons search our library's catalog, they are also searching the catalogs of our fellow consortium members. In 2024, 25% of FHCPL's circulation was materials borrowed from or loaned to consortium members. Not only can any Ohioan receive a library card from FHCPL, but any FHCPL cardholder can use their FHCPL library card in any of our consortium libraries.

Second, FHCPL is part of the Ohio Digital Library. Digital materials are an important part of FHCPL's collection and make up 19% of our overall circulation. The majority of that digital circulation is through the shared Ohio Digital Library catalog.

Third, FHCPL takes part in the Collaborative Summer Library Program. The shared theme allows our library staff to utilize the collective wisdom of our state's talented library staff as they develop decorations, programs and prizes to keep children excited about reading all summer long. Our SummerREAD program started this week with approximately 900 patrons attending kickoff events on the first day.

Collaboration

Hancock County is a community with a celebrated collaborative spirit and FHCPL is proud to work with nonprofit, local and state government partners to connect our community to resources.

For the 2023 tax season, the library distributed over 3,500 local and federal tax forms and helped countless patrons access and print additional forms necessary to complete their taxes. The library sets aside a meeting room for the United Way of Hancock County's popular Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, which helped bring over \$1 million dollars back into the community in the 2023 tax season.

FHCPL also took part in the Ohio Department of Health's COVID test distribution program. From March 2021 through May 2025, FHCPL distributed over 54,400 tests to the community. Additionally, we frequently partner with Hancock Public Health to provide access to their mobile clinic at library events.

In cooperation with Hancock Public Health, the City of Findlay Parks and Recreation and numerous other local partners, the library will offer Summer Connect. This series of eight family-friendly neighborhood events is designed to connect families with local resources, hands-on activities and meaningful community engagement.

To support the state's Science of Reading initiative, FHCPL has built a collection of decodable books. FHCPL's Youth Service's Librarian has received training in the Science of Reading and has developed summer phonics review kits available to our families, with scripted lessons and games.

FHCPL serves as the Local Program Partner for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. Organizations such as the Juvenile Court and Women's Resource Center help share registration information with their clients. Our community has embraced this program and we are proud to be the first Local Program Partner in Ohio to have a fully funded endowment to support the local share of program's costs. With continued state support, Hancock County is able to help our youngest readers prepare for Kindergarten.

Materials for Youth

FHCPL's Youth and Teen collections contain approximately 75,000 items. Annual circulation of physical print material for youth has grown by nearly 51,000 items over the last 10 years. That does not include the circulation of digital materials for youth, which has also grown significantly over that timeframe. We are proud to offer a wide collection that is demonstrably meeting the needs of our community.

The budget maintains an overly vague directive regarding the content of youth materials. It is unclear what is included in "materials related to sexual orientation or gendered identity or expression." This could mean a picture book about a girl who likes dressing as a princess or a novel that references a teen's first crush.

Reviewing each of the 75,000 physical items currently in the library's youth collections would be a massive undertaking. The youth collection ranges from board books for babies to chapter books for early readers to novels for teens and includes music and movies. An extremely ambitious estimated average of 1 hour to review each youth item allows us to assume at least 75,000 hours of staff time necessary to conduct the review. FHCPL currently has approximately 12,000 hours of youth services staff time in a year. Even suspending every other aspect of Youth Services, including programming, purchasing new materials, answering patron questions, pulling books to fill patron holds and re-shelving returned materials, it would take our staff at least 6 years to review the existing materials to ensure compliance.

FHCPL's branch is a series of three open rooms. Patrons enter the first room, which includes media and large print, and pass through the second room, containing the adult fiction and nonfiction, before arriving at the children's collection in the third room. This provision could mean that youth cannot be in the first two rooms of the library, making it impossible for them to access the youth collection.

As clearly stated in the library's Collection Development Policy, "Responsibility for minors' use of the library collections rests with their parents, guardians and/or caregivers." FHCPL's Youth Services staff are well versed in assisting parents in finding materials that are appropriate for their family's needs. Simply, it is the responsibility of the library to provide a wide variety of items to meet their community's needs and the responsibility of individual patrons and families to determine which of those options is right for them.

Library Funding

FHCPL relies on the Public Library Fund for the majority of the library's funding. In 2024, the PLF was 66% of the library's revenue. A local levy, initially passed in 2010, was just renewed for the third time with robust community support. However, this levy generated only 22% of FHCPL's revenue last year.

I estimate that Am. Sub. HB 96, as introduced by the Senate, would reduce state support for FHCPL to less than was in any of the last 3 years. In the second half of 2025, the proposal will result in approximately \$110,000 less than was anticipated from the OBM estimate we received in December 2024. Meanwhile other costs, such as electricity, health insurance, library materials and program supplies continue to rise.

Reduced funding will require FHCPL to make difficult decisions about which resources our community no longer receives. As an example, the funding loss more than FHCPL's combined annual budget for youth resources, including books, media, digital materials, and programming and outreach supplies. It is approximately the same amount as the library's budget for property maintenance and repairs. We could also view that reduction as roughly a quarter of FHCPL's total budget for new materials.

Even more concerning is a move away from a valued partnership as a percentage of the GRF to a line item. Deducting over 10.2 million from public library funding for state agencies further reduces a budget that will already see state support at the same level as 2000.

Ohio's public libraries are proud to visit the statehouse during each budget year to share the wide variety of resources we provide to tax payers and to thank the legislature for making those resources possible. It is deeply concerning to think our visit during the next budget cycle could include stories of resources we are no longer able to offer our communities. I urge you to fund the Public Library Fund at the level originally proposed in the Executive Budget, with the \$10.2 million in deductions funding directly from the General Revenue Fund, and to remove provisions related to library materials. We look forward to continuing to work together to serve Ohioans.