

**Interested Party Testimony – House Bill 96
Senate Higher Education Committee – May 15, 2025
Tracy Strobel, Chief Executive Officer, Cuyahoga County Public Library**

Chairman Roegner, Vice Chair Timken, Ranking Member Ingram, and esteemed members of the Senate Higher Education Committee, my name is Tracy Strobel and I am the CEO of the Cuyahoga County Public Library. It is an honor to speak with you today about the vital role Cuyahoga County Public Library plays in adult education and workforce development in Cuyahoga County. I am here to highlight the impactful work of our Aspire Greater Cleveland program, the Solon Innovation Center in collaboration with Swagelok, and our groundbreaking initiative at the Parma Heights branch addressing the childcare workforce shortage.

Cuyahoga County Public Library is a valued community anchor, providing critical resources, services and programs that address residents' needs in the 47 municipalities we serve. The Aspire Greater Cleveland Adult Education program, the Solon Innovation Center, and the Parma Heights childcare workforce development program demonstrate our contributions to workforce development and lifelong learning.

The Aspire Greater Cleveland program is a cornerstone of the library's commitment to adult education and lifelong learning, offering crucial pathways for individuals to enhance their skills and expand their opportunities. Aspire Greater Cleveland is a collaboration between Cuyahoga County Public Library, Cleveland Public Library, and the Cuyahoga County government, with support from the Ohio Department of Higher Education's ASPIRE program and United Way.

Through Adult Basic and Secondary Education, Aspire Greater Cleveland helps adults obtain their GED or high school equivalency, unlocking doors to further education and better employment prospects. Aspire Greater Cleveland's Workforce Preparation component directly addresses the needs of local employers by providing essential training in high demand workplace skills, resume writing, interviewing techniques, and digital literacy, ensuring our residents are ready to contribute meaningfully to our economy.

The impact of Aspire Greater Cleveland is profound. It empowers individuals to achieve their educational goals, secure meaningful employment, and become more engaged and contributing members of their communities. The library's accessible locations and welcoming environment make these crucial services readily available to those who need them most, often removing barriers that traditional educational institutions might present. In 2024, 3,220 participants enrolled in Aspire Greater Cleveland programs and digital skills training.

Building upon this foundation, Cuyahoga County Public Library has forged a dynamic partnership with Swagelok, a worldwide leader in industrial fluid system manufacturing headquartered in Solon, Ohio. CCPL recently opened the Solon Innovation Center in collaboration with Swagelok.

The Innovation Center is a creative, collaborative, and educational space focused on promoting the most in-demand, smart manufacturing skills that local businesses seek, exciting students about career pathways in smart manufacturing and providing free access to design software, equipment, and training that supports regional workforce development. This collaborative initiative represents a forward-thinking approach to workforce development and STEM education. Individuals can gain hands-on experience with specialized equipment, including a vacuum former, water jet cutter, robotic arm, laser engraver, sublimation heat press, virtual reality headset, and 3D printer. Beyond equipment, the Center fosters the development of crucial technical skills through targeted training and workshops centered on design thinking, rapid prototyping, and digital fabrication. It bridges the gap between education and industry by facilitating meaningful mentorship opportunities and providing direct exposure to potential career pathways within the smart manufacturing sector.

The partnership with Swagelok brings real-world expertise and resources to the library, ensuring that the training provided is relevant to the needs of local industry. This innovative model not only equips individuals with in-demand skills but also fosters a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, Cuyahoga County Public Library is proactively addressing the critical need for childcare workers at our Parma Heights branch set to open in early 2026. Recognizing the significant workforce shortage in this vital sector, we have initiated a collaboration focused on training and supporting individuals interested in pursuing childcare careers. Through a partnership between Cuyahoga County Public Library, The Centers for Families and Children, Cuyahoga Community College, and the City of Parma Heights, our new Parma Heights Branch library will serve as a regional Early Childhood Education and Training Center. Operated by The Centers for Families and Children and co-located with the library, the Early Learning Center will have a focus on developing early literacy skills and a love of books and reading. Because the early childhood care workforce has been one of the slowest sectors to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, this center will also serve as a training facility for Cuyahoga Community College students seeking an Associate's degree in Early Childhood Education. These students will receive practical experience that will go towards their degree requirements as they learn best practices from The Centers' highly skilled staff and the Library's early childhood literacy experts.

By integrating workforce development and lifelong learning into our branch services, we are actively contributing to the stability and growth of our region while providing our community members with valuable career pathways and opportunities.

We urge this committee to recognize the Cuyahoga County Public Library's significant contributions and consider how the state can continue to support these impactful initiatives. Investing in our libraries is an investment in the future of Ohio's workforce and the success of our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.