

Portage County District Library Calls for a Meaningful Restoration of Library Funding.

All across the state, Ohio's public libraries rely on state funding through the Public Library Fund for a significant portion of our budgets. Over the years, that fund has been reduced from 2.22% of the General Revenue Fund to the now-proposed 1.66%. Governor DeWine's proposed biennium budget makes mention of the amount of money that would go to public libraries throughout Ohio, while neglecting to mention that those proposed numbers are, dollar-for-dollar, less than libraries received in 1999.

This budget cycle marks twelve years of sustained cuts for libraries across the state. While many libraries have attempted to make up for this loss by having residents adopt property tax levies, 50 of Ohio's 251 libraries rely solely on the Public Library Fund for their budget. Those 50 libraries combined serve almost one million Ohioans. Over 1/10th of those Ohioans – 106,237 – are represented by Portage County District Library.

Because our budget is a percentage, rather than a set amount, it directly reflects the economic health of the state. Since our percentage was cut in 2009, Ohio's public libraries have been vital partners in statewide recovery initiatives. Across the state, libraries have stepped up to get Ohioans back to work, combat the opioid epidemic, and create access that bridges the digital divide. Libraries have done this while simultaneously providing their core services to educate, enrich, and inspire our communities. However, due to the sustained cuts in our budget percentage, we have not been equal partners in the benefits of the state's economic recovery.

There is a statewide push for our funding percentage to remain at the temporary amount of 1.7%. That level of funding would at least protect the status-quo. For our system, that amount of funding means that the locations closed since 2009 will have no hope of reopening, that hour and service cuts from over a decade ago will remain in place. It will mean that four of our county's school districts will continue to rely on library service through a branch that is only open 25 hours a week. Many of the children in those elementary and middle schools have never in their lives been able to visit an adequately-funded public library.

For our system, the status-quo is not acceptable. While we pride ourselves on offering the best service possible, we must face the fact that that we are attempting to provide modern library services with funding that is stuck in the 1990s. For our patrons, and for those all across the state in the same situation, the board and administration of the Portage County District Library calls for a meaningful restoration of library funding. We invite library supporters in our county and across the state to join us in this effort to have state lawmakers treat public libraries as true partners in Ohio's success.