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Press Release

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Public Library Funding Cut in New State Budget

The 2010-2011 state budget bill signed into law by Governor Strickland on July 17 reduces in temporary law Ohio's Public Library Fund (PLF) from 2.22% to 1.97% of the tax collections included in the State's General Revenue Fund. Since tax revenues are dependent upon the state of the economy, it is impossible to accurately predict what dollar impact this reduction will have on library funding. However, the bill estimates that this temporary law change will cost the PLF an additional loss of \$84.3 million over the next two years. The cut is substantially less than the approximate \$227.3 million cut proposed by Gov. Ted Strickland on June 19 but will still have a significant impact on the services provided by Ohio's public libraries.

"These newest budget cuts, combined with the precipitous drop in the PLF in the first six months of this year due to declining state tax revenues, could result in state funding for our Library dropping as much as 20% in 2009 as compared to calendar year 2008," said Kim Fender, Executive Director of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County. Since 2000, annual state funding for Cincinnati's public library will drop \$14.7 million (28%) at the same time the rate of inflation is 25% and operating expenses have risen 15%.

The decreased funding comes at a time when Ohio's public libraries are experiencing an unprecedented increase in the demand for services. "We're seeing huge growth in all of our services. In these hard times, more and more people are turning to the Library for books to read, homework assistance, help in finding a job, computer access, programs on how to deal with bankruptcy and foreclosures, and programs on early literacy for their small children."

In order to close the budget gap, since 2001 the Library has reduced staff by nearly 20%, cut hours by 10%, postponed or eliminated capital projects, and made further service cuts. "We have acted in anticipation of additional funding cuts by using prudent fiscal management and taking measures to reduce expenditures, including canceling ongoing maintenance," said Ms. Fender. "But these latest cuts are very difficult. By utilizing all available options to stretch financial resources, we have been able to continue operations without branch closings or additional reductions in hours of operations. However, this could change at any time if estimated state funding drops further. We will closely monitor the budget and make necessary adjustments in order to continue providing the best possible Library service for our community at a time when it is most needed."

"Ohio's public libraries have the citizens of Ohio to thank for exerting extraordinary influence on their elected representatives in the Ohio General Assembly to minimize the cuts to library funding. Through e-mails and phone calls to legislators and the Governor, patrons told those life stories and how Ohio's public libraries have made a difference. This overwhelming groundswell of public support convinced the legislature to reject the Governor's massive cuts, and attempt to preserve library funding as much as possible during this challenging financial situation."

“This is a budget with which no one can be happy, but we appreciate the Ohio General Assembly's effort to restore \$143 million to the Public Library Fund,” Fender commented. “This bill means that Ohio's public libraries will not face cuts that could have amounted to 50% of previous funding. However, depending upon the accuracy of the projections made by the Ohio Department of Taxation, our Library and others throughout the state could still be facing devastating cuts in branches, staff, hours, and services.”