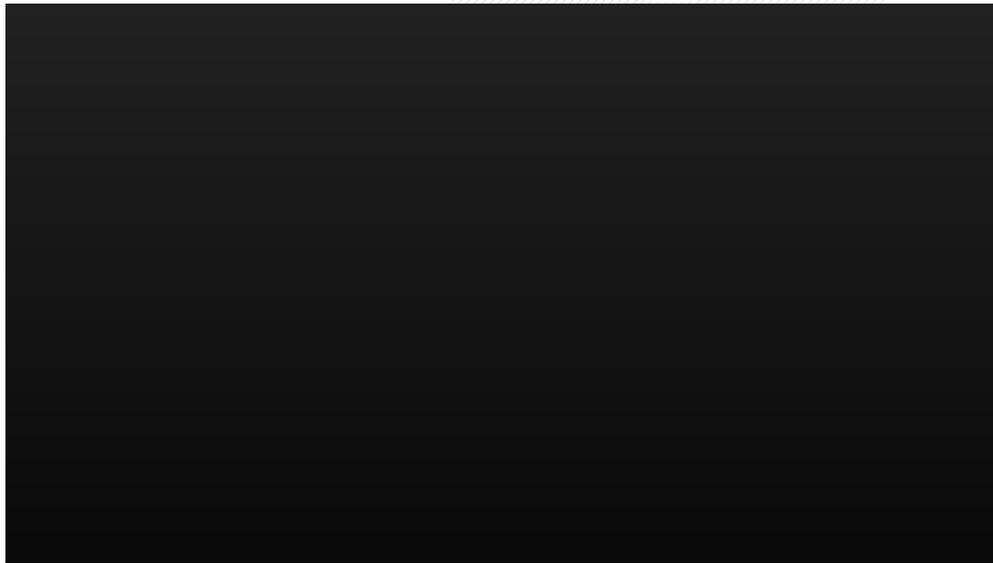


## EDUCATION STATION

# Ohio House budget proposal would cut public library funding by more than \$100 million over next 2 years, advocates say

According to the Ohio Library Council, the Cuyahoga County Public Library system would see nearly 24% of its state support cut if the current House budget passes.



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PARMA, Ohio — As lawmakers in the [Ohio House of Representatives](#) finalize their version of the state's operating budget, more than 300 public library leaders from across the state are preparing to rally at the Statehouse on Tuesday for "Library Day." Their mission will be to fight back against a proposal they say threatens critical library funding.

One of those leaders is Tracy Strobel, CEO of the Cuyahoga County Public Library, which stands to lose \$6.9 million annually under the House's current plan.

"It's just not as dependable for libraries," Strobel said. "They proposed to demote us essentially to a line item in the budget — an appropriation that can be changed every other year or by the governor even during the year."

The House's proposal eliminates the Public Library Fund, which currently allocates a set percentage of Ohio's general revenue to public libraries. Gov. Mike DeWine's original proposal called for 1.75% of that revenue to go toward library funding.

The House version, however, removes that percentage-based structure, replacing it with a fixed appropriation — something the Ohio Library Council says will destabilize library budgets.

According to the Ohio Library Council, the Cuyahoga County Public Library system would see the second-largest funding cut in the state — nearly 24% of its current state support.

"For us, it will be very difficult to adjust," Strobel said. "Of course, we don't want to directly impact public services too much, but it will definitely have consequences."

At the Parma-Snow Branch of the Cuyahoga County Public Library, parents like Megan Zavasnik are worried about what those consequences might mean for their families. Her 4-year-old son Colton, who has autism, visits the library weekly.

"I like to integrate him with other people and kids and playing and books and things like that," Zavasnik said.

Learning that the library system could lose millions of dollars left her frustrated.

"It's just really sad because why? What's the point? These are things that kids need, humans need, people need," Zavasnik told 3News. "Why would we do that? What helpful thing is that going to do? Nothing."

Statewide, the OLC estimates the House proposal would reduce public library funding by more than \$100 million over the next two years.

Library systems are running campaigns for patrons to [write to legislators to keep the Public Library Fund](#). According to the Cuyahoga County Public Library, more than 8,000 messages have been sent to state representatives.

In response to concerns, Olivia Wile, spokesperson for the Ohio House Majority Caucus released a statement to 3News defending the change: "Ohio's Public Library Fund (PLF) is tied to the General Revenue Fund (GRF), a model used by only two states, which creates funding instability as libraries' budgets fluctuate with the state's financial health. This structure makes it difficult for libraries to plan. ... To ensure sustainable, reliable library services, it's crucial to adopt a more predictable and stable funding model."

As the budget battle continues in Columbus, library leaders say they'll keep pressing lawmakers to reconsider, and to restore the funding they say communities across Ohio rely on every day.

Dr. Amy Acton, who is running for governor, issued the following statement on Tuesday morning:

"The legislature's proposal to slash Ohio's amazing system of public libraries is unconscionable, and will harm children, families and communities across the state. I urge all Ohioans to call their representatives and demand they reverse course and stop attacking our public libraries. Public libraries are a place where we should feel safe coming together regardless of party, and as Governor I will fight every day against special interest efforts to take away our right to enjoy them and the vital services they provide."

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