



## OHIO PUBLIC LIBRARY INFORMATION NETWORK

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To the Sunset Review Committee  
Rep. Tim Brown, Chair

Testimony from **Stephen Hedges**, Director  
The Ohio Public Library Information Network

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Chairman Brown, members of the Sunset Review Committee,

My name is Stephen Hedges and I am the Director of the Ohio Public Library Information Network, more commonly known as OPLIN.

OPLIN is defined in Ohio Revised Code Section 3375.64 as an **independent agency within the State Library of Ohio**. The **eleven (11) members of its governing board** are appointed by the State Library Board and their only **compensation** is reimbursement for actual and necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties, usually normal mileage allowance for travel to Board meetings.

OPLIN was created for the **purpose** of ensuring equity of access to electronic information for all residents of Ohio. OPLIN fulfills this purpose by pursuing two primary **goals**. The **first** is to connect Ohio public libraries to the Internet, so Ohioans can access the diverse resources of Ohio's public libraries and, through the libraries, access international, federal, state, regional, and local information resources. We achieve this goal mainly through acquiring and maintaining an **Internet connection and adequate bandwidth for each public library system** in Ohio. Related to this goal is a secondary goal: assisting Ohio public libraries with technologies that help them deliver online information to their users.

The **second** primary goal is to provide access to high-quality databases of electronic information for Ohio's public libraries and for all Ohioans. We do this mainly through the **Ohio Web Library**, a collection of fundamental information databases—such as online encyclopedias and magazines—which is available to all Ohioans through the [ohioweblibrary.org](http://ohioweblibrary.org) website.

OPLIN **funding** reached a high point in 2000, when it received almost \$6 million from the General Revenue Fund. This amount has gradually decreased until OPLIN now receives **\$3.7 million** from the **Public Library Fund**. Another \$2 million in spending authority is available to allow OPLIN to use the approximately \$1.2 million in reimbursements of telecommunications costs received annually through the **federal E-rate program** for schools and libraries.

Because of its relationship with the State Library, which provides many support services, OPLIN is very **cost-effective**. About **90% of our budget is used to purchase direct services** for Ohio public libraries and for Ohioans. In the one area where OPLIN activities **overlap** with those of the information networks serving school and academic libraries—the purchase of the Ohio Web Library information databases—all three networks and the State Library **combine financial resources** to purchase the information as a single partnership, resulting in greatly reduced prices. More information about this partnership can be found at the [LibrariesConnectOhio.org](http://LibrariesConnectOhio.org) website.

OPLIN **staff** has dwindled over the years from seven to the current **five people**. As a result, OPLIN has reduced some services, especially in the area of training librarians to use Internet resources effectively. We now focus our efforts on our **two primary tasks**: buying and maintaining broadband Internet connections for libraries; and buying and maintaining information databases for Ohio residents.

OPLIN is a **service-provider to the public** through the public libraries, which are our customers; OPLIN has **no regulatory** authority. The OPLIN Board consists of directors, staff, and past or present trustees of public libraries, and they meet six times a year. All OPLIN Board meetings are open to the public and include an agenda item for **public participation**.

Although **no law, federal or otherwise, requires that OPLIN be renewed**, the need for OPLIN continues and is greater than in 1995, as the public library systems we support have become the backbone for Internet access for so many Ohio citizens, including many who need public library Internet to apply for employment or use government services. Ohio public libraries currently provide about 13,000 public Internet workstations for Ohioans, and this access is critical for searching for jobs, starting new businesses, and finding state services available through the Internet. **Ohio public libraries depend on OPLIN** to keep them connected to the Internet, and to keep essential electronic information flowing to all Ohioans.

Thank you for your support, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about OPLIN.