May 7, 2024
To the Sunset Review Committee
Sen. Shane Wilkin, Chair

Testimony from Donald Yarman, Director
The Ohio Public Library Information Network

Chair Wilkin, members of the Sunset Review Committee,

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

As defined in Ohio Revised Code Section 3375.64, OPLIN is 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 through library websites and at ohioweblibrary.org.

OPLIN is funded by a $3.7 million transfer from the Public Library Fund. Another $2 million in spending authority is available to allow OPLIN to use the approximately $1.4 million in reimbursements of telecommunications costs received annually through the federal E-rate program for schools and libraries. OPLIN's budget has remained flat since fiscal year 2012.

Because of its relationship with the State Library, which provides many support services, OPLIN is very cost-effective. Over 85% 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 website.

There are currently six OPLIN staff people who support OPLIN's services statewide: buying and maintaining broadband Internet connections to libraries, ensure working access to the subscription databases purchased by OPLIN and by libraries themselves, helping libraries keep their websites secure and accessible, and assisting libraries with their work to promote digital literacy and inclusion.

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, as the public library systems we support have become the backbone for Internet access and digital equity for so many Ohio citizens, including many who need public library Internet to apply for employment, use government services, or complete their schoolwork. Last year, Ohio public libraries provided 12,000 public Internet workstations for Ohioans, and reported over 16.7 million public wireless sessions. This access is critical for searching for jobs, advancing education, 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.