

## Statewide Consortium of Ohio County Law Library Resources Boards



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Laura S. Novelo

Good afternoon Chair Wilkin, Vice Chair Hillyer, and members of the Ohio Sunset Review Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Consortium of Ohio County Law Libraries (Consortium).

Pursuant to the charge of the Ohio Legislature, Law Library Resources Boards officially took over the operations of the 88 county law libraries in Ohio on January 1, 2010. Prior to 2007, law libraries were operated by private associations, and from 2007-2010, law libraries transitioned to the county agencies they are today. The Consortium was established on January 1, 2011 by ORC § 3375.481, with five specific charges:

1. *Negotiate contracts that each county law library resources board may use for purchasing or obtaining access to legal research and reference materials available in any medium,*
2. *Catalog existing resources held by county law library resources boards and facilitate the sharing of those resources by the county law library resources boards,*
3. *Develop and recommend guidelines for the collection of or access to legal resources that ought to be provided by a county law library resources board,*
4. *Provide consultation and assistance to county law library resources boards, and Issue an annual report of its activities to each county law library resources board,*
5. *Issue an annual report of its activities to each county law library resources board.*

Our Ohio Sunset Review Committee Agency Questionnaire details how the Consortium has carried out these charges over the years, through negotiating with various suppliers on behalf of county law libraries, providing cloud cataloging services to the libraries, developing Core Collection guidelines through the Consortium's Advisory Council, visiting all county law libraries and providing consultation and guidance when requested, and providing annual reports of the Consortium's yearly activities.

Ohio's county law libraries provide an invaluable service to the constituents they serve. They provide access to costly legal research materials in the form of books, databases, software and technology to members of the courts, attorneys, and the public. They deftly navigate the fine line between providing legal research and assistance without straying into the unauthorized practice of law. They provide a place for solo practitioner attorneys who can't otherwise afford office space to meet with their clients. Many go above and beyond in their programming by offering CLEs, training for the public, organizing mock trial events, hosting book clubs, providing the space and technological expertise for Zoom hearings, and so on.

The Consortium provides support to the county law libraries so they can successfully carry out their many duties. In addition to fulfilling the charges above, the Consortium provides a community that all the libraries and their librarians can rely upon for information and support. The Consortium pays for and maintains a listserv that all county law librarians can join to ask questions and request resources from their fellow law librarians. Many people believe that law libraries are not needed because everything is available online. It is not! Newer information is indeed available online. Most historic information is not. The practice of law is dependent upon precedent. Not all libraries can afford to keep or have immediate access to some historic and obscure information. Yet this information is critical to the effective practice of law. Not a day goes by that I don't see at least one such request in the listserv. In this way, the Consortium facilitates the pooling of knowledge and resources between all the county law libraries. No law



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library has to operate in isolation, and smaller law libraries with smaller budgets are able to receive support from larger libraries that are able to purchase and maintain more resources.

The Consortium operate numerous grant programs to assist the law libraries as well. Optional Grants, in the amount of \$4,000-\$5,000, are offered every year to support staff training and career development, programming for patrons, the purchase of new technology, and multi-agency collaboration. The Consortium awarded over \$55,000 in Optional Grants in 2024 alone. The Refund Grant program is also in effect most years. The Consortium is funded through the county law libraries, who each contribute 2% of their yearly statutory funds deposited to the Consortium. The Consortium only collects the full 2% once every five years. The other years, the Consortium operates the Refund Grant Program, whereby each law library is able to keep 25% of the 2% statutory contribution they owe to the Consortium. Finally, the Consortium provides needs-based grants of emergency funding for purchases that are central to the operation of a library.

Ohio's 88 county law libraries and their dedicated librarians share a passion for helping the courts, attorneys, and the public find the legal information they need in the best legal sources available. The Consortium is proud to support and facilitate the important work of Ohio's county law libraries, and to do so at no cost to the state general revenue fund. I would ask the Committee to please allow the Consortium of Ohio County Law Libraries to continue this important work. Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Novelo  
Executive Director  
Consortium of Ohio County Law Libraries