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United Way of Greater Toledo
Serving Lucas, Wood,
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United Way Urges Elected Officials to Support Ohio Governor's Imagination Library

[Feb. 23, 2021, TOLEDO, OHIO] – United Way of Greater Toledo (UWGT) is asking the community to join them on February 25 for a “virtual day of action,” where local advocates can call or leave a comment on the website of their State House Representative and State Senator, urging them to support the Ohio Governor’s Imagination Library.

The event and complete instructions on how to reach out to a state official can be found on [UWGT's Facebook page](#). This outreach is prompted by Governor DeWine’s recent Ohio Executive Budget Proposal for 2022-2023. Within this, the administration has outlined a \$16 million allocation for continued support of Imagination Library, which equates to \$8 million per fiscal year.

“Ohio Governor’s Imagination Library is a powerful program that delivers a free book, every month, to children locally and across our state from birth to age five,” said Libby Schoen, director of education and collaboratives at UWGT.

For historical context: Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library was launched in Lucas County in 2014 by *Women’s Initiative* of United Way – a philanthropic affinity group of the organization. In 2019, Governor DeWine and his wife, Fran, who were long-time supporters of Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library, proposed that the program be written into the state budget for the 2020-2021 fiscal years. After the budget’s passage, the program was then known in the state as Ohio Governor’s Imagination Library.

“Financial support from the state budget means that Imagination Library programs across Ohio can expand their services to more children. Essentially, every dollar we bring in locally is matched by a dollar from the state. In Lucas County, this has led to us offering Imagination Library to every child in all zip codes. It has also allowed us to open Imagination Library enrollment for all children in Ottawa and Wood County.”

Currently, 13,788 children in Lucas, Ottawa and Wood County, under the age of five, are enrolled in Imagination Library. Since 2014, UWGT has mailed over 300,000 books to Lucas County children, while Ottawa County has mailed 1,615 books and Wood County has mailed 16,516 books since their recent launch in 2020.

In Ohio, 720,856 kids are currently enrolled in the Ohio Governor’s Imagination Library. Given support from the state, paired with local philanthropic dollars, it costs just \$12.60 to fund one child’s books for an entire year.

“We want state legislators to understand the power of this program. It is an inexpensive way to get books in the hands of kids, which leads to improved literacy rates, therefore increasing kindergarten readiness. Without support from the state, we could not do this work,” said Schoen.

The Governor’s Ohio Executive Budget Proposal has already been delivered to the Ohio House of Representatives for debate, and shortly thereafter, will be passed along to the Ohio Senate. During these discussions, legislators can remove proposed items or adjust their proposed amounts. UWGT encourages advocates to urge legislators to retain and pass a budget that includes the Ohio Governor’s Imagination Library at \$16 million.

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