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State Representative
56th House District

Chair Blessing, Vice Chair Rezabek, Ranking Member Clyde, thank you for allowing me to bring before you House Bill 108, legislation that would require that the Ohio Channel broadcast all House standing committees and subcommittees via audio and video when possible. This was previously introduced as HB 262, and had bipartisan support. My thanks also go to my joint sponsor Rep Retherford, for his work on this issue.

We can all agree that guaranteeing transparency in the work we do is one of the primary responsibilities we have to the taxpayers of this state. In this spirit, it is important that the work we do in committee be viewable and accessible to our constituencies across the state. While we would certainly hope that all Ohioans would have the opportunity to travel to Columbus to witness committee hearings, this is not always feasible. As technology has become more prevalent and cost accessible, it has become increasingly clear that this change in policy is long overdue.

Those of you that have served on the House Finance and Appropriations Committee have witnessed first-hand this policy in practice and the benefit it has provided to interested parties and constituents. We have heard from a number of our constituents, and others across the state, who were able to watch the House budget hearings from home or from their office, and were thankful for the openness and transparency that the broadcasts provided.

We have been assured by the Ohio Channel that their current funding is sufficient in achieving this goal, and as such we do not expect a cost to taxpayers in this regard. Furthermore, the audio and video equipment for this endeavor has been purchased and in some cases is already in use. The Ohio Channel has enough camera equipment to simultaneously record up to four committee meetings, and enough audio equipment to record every standing committee, if they were to all meet at the same time. Almost all committee rooms are already wired with necessary audio equipment. Therefore, the expense of acquiring the equipment required has already been made and there would be no additional cost to the state in this aspect either. The Ohio Channel would prioritize video recording and broadcast meetings, as opposed to audio recording them, whenever possible.

Lastly, in the proposed language it specifically requires that the cameras be operated in a way that the focus of the camera at any given point would be on either the chair of the committee, the witness providing testimony, or a representative asking a question of the witness. Wide angle committee shots of the entire room would not be used.

I believe this is a common-sense solution to provide greater transparency in the Statehouse with no cost to the Ohio taxpayer.

Thank you for your consideration, I welcome any questions on the bill.