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**Ohio House State and Local Government Committee
Senate Bill 239—Regional Councils of Government
Written Testimony of Dennis R. Hetzel
President & Executive Director / Ohio News Media Association
June 19th, 2018**

Chairwoman Anielski, Vice Chair Hambley, Ranking Member Holmes, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 239, sponsored by State Senator Matt Dolan. The Ohio News Media Association is pleased to support this legislation, which will increase transparency and accountability for councils of government (COGs).

COGs are important tools for local governments when used properly, however it is important to remember that they are public entities. SB 239 establishes much needed safeguards to ensure COGs have effective oversight from the Auditor of State and that COG members adhere to Ohio ethics laws. These are important provisions that increase accountability and protect taxpayers.

We strongly support language included in SB 239 that clarifies the existing public records exemption for 'trade secrets' does not apply to the members and names of representatives of a COG. Having this information available to the public is important in determining whether or not potential conflicts of interest exist. More importantly, COGs clearly are public entities with public responsibilities, so the notion that something as basic as membership on the council could be treated as a trade secret ought to be unacceptable.

SB 239 is an important measure that preserves the ability of local governments to take full advantage of a COG while ensuring the public interest is protected. Thank you for your time and favorable consideration.