

Testimony on Am. Sub. HB 166 before the Senate Finance Committee

Kayse Schmucker

May 23, 2019

Good morning Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the committee. My name is Kayse Schmucker, and I am a freelance production assistant and non-union assistant director from Kent, making me one of the nearly [3,000 working production crew members](#) in the film community that has grown here in Ohio. First, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today, and thank you for the ongoing commitment you have demonstrated to growing the film industry in Ohio; in supporting legislation like SB 37, many of you in this committee are the reason our industry and our livelihood have a fighting chance. The version of the operational budget under discussion today with its removal of the film tax credit, however, threatens my job, livelihood and thus my ability to continue living in the state.

I began my career in film production three years ago almost to the day. A recent graduate of Baldwin Wallace University, I had never been on any set before, let alone a film set the scale of *The Fate of the Furious*—the first project I worked on. Since then, I have worked as a staff production assistant on over 12 feature films and have worked countless on television and commercial productions, almost all of which have been in the state. Without knowing it when I began, I would never have had any of those opportunities if not for the Ohio film tax credit.

When people think of a production assistant, they usually think of someone bringing the director coffee—and while I have done my fair share of that, we provide so much more to the functionality of the filmmaking process. In the assistant director department, we are the eyes, ears, and hands of every production. That means in every phase of the filmmaking process, from pre-production to post, we are not only interacting with nearly every crew member but also with the countless people in the community we come into contact with over the course of that process. We are often the people at the point of sale for many of the daily expenses of a production. I have been the person picking up rental cars for out-of-town crew; I have shopped for countless office supplies on behalf of the production; and I have been the person picking up gear and equipment from local vendors. Being the one completing these transactions on behalf of a production and knowing the myriad other transactions being made by other departments just on a single production, the economic figures are not shocking to me—the Motion Picture Association of America’s latest report on economic impact showed that in 2016 its [member companies spent nearly \\$17 million on Ohio vendors](#) alone. That number doesn’t even include money spent on food and at local restaurants—it’s easy to see the scale of the impact when you’re the person ordering and picking up lunch for nearly 30 crew members in a production office from every day for a month during pre-production (and, yes, when picking up coffee for

25). I see the faces of the Ohioans running these businesses at work every day, and it's hard to imagine taking away this tax credit wouldn't affect all of us.

As a production assistant, I am not a member of a union, though that's the eventual goal. My job is an entry level position held by most people in the industry at some point in their careers. For future graduates, particularly those coming from programs like Cleveland State's new film school, having these entry level positions available in the community where you've built your academic network is absolutely crucial to succeeding after graduation. Giving graduates from this burgeoning program and others like it the chance to succeed by maintaining a viable workforce in their industry of study is also crucial to building a symbiotic relationship with these academic programs and a steady flow of skilled workers ready to contribute to the local economy. Without an incentive built to last, these graduates—like those of us already in the industry—will be forced to move out of state for opportunities and rebuild their networks from the ground up. Considering that this film school was built with [\\$7.5 million of state money](#), it hardly stands to benefit either the graduates or Ohio's economic growth to lose all potential film projects coming into the state that would follow the elimination of the incentive.

Lastly, I want to discuss a part of production that is most near and dear to me. Spending most of my time on set in my particular department, I meet nearly every crew member—both local and distant hire—that works on any given project as a requirement of my job. That means over the last three years, I've gotten to know nearly every local crew member in Cleveland and many in Cincinnati. These are the people—my friends and coworkers whom I now consider my family—who will lose the most if the tax credit is eliminated. [Production wages earned in Ohio surpassed \\$160 million](#) according to the MPAA's latest report. I've seen the impact of the growing incentive in my own wallet; Last year, my annual income was the highest it's been since starting my career in the industry, and nearly all of my wages were made from feature films made in the state. For myself, my friends and family—for us to stay in Ohio, where many of us have *chosen* to work because it is our home—we cannot lose this tax credit.

Thank you for hearing my testimony on the film tax credit's behalf, and please take this into consideration as you discuss the operational budget for the upcoming years.