

# Testimony

**By Virgil Strickler, General Manager of the Ohio Expositions Commission  
Before the Senate General Government and Agency Review Committee**

## **FY 2020-21 Budget Hearing**

Good morning, Chair Shuring, Ranking Member O'Brien, and committee members. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Virgil Strickler, and I am general manager of the Ohio Expositions Commission, which operates the year-round Ohio Expo Center event facility, and our great State Fair.

The Commission's mission is: *To professionally operate and maintain for public benefit a year-round, service-oriented event facility and produce the annual Ohio State Fair.*

Our vision is: *To be recognized as a unique, dynamic and profitable facility committed to creating a nationally recognized event venue and to produce a premier agricultural-based fair showcasing the best of Ohio with a world-class visitor experience.*

The Commission operates the Ohio Expo Center, a year-round, multipurpose convention and meeting facility. The Expo Center is host to five of Columbus' top 10 conventions and more than 200 annual events held at our 360-acre complex, almost twice the number of events (125 events) hosted in 2010. These events generate an estimated 3.2 million visitors each and every year. The Expo Center creates a substantial economic impact on the City of Columbus, Franklin County and the state of Ohio, with a 2011 economic impact study estimating direct and indirect expenditures at more than \$478 million, as well as \$14 million in local, county and state tax revenues, 4,600 full and part-time jobs. This number is estimated to have increased significantly in the past 8 years as the number of events has continued to rise.

The Commission is incredibly thankful for the capital funding that has been allocated to the Ohio Expo Center in recent years, including funds which allowed for the construction of a new agricultural facility and a contemporary multi-purpose exhibition building, as well as major renovations to the Gilligan Livestock Complex and Celeste Center. These renovations have greatly enhanced our facilities, making us one of the most unique and versatile event venues in the Midwest, attracting new and exciting events. Conversely, the closure of nearby event facilities in Central Ohio has increased the demand for rental space at the Ohio Expo Center, pushing our staff to continually work overtime and secure additional temporary employees to properly service events and please event-goers.

While the events held here at the Ohio Expo Center do make up for roughly half of our revenue, we wouldn't be who we are without our premier event – the Ohio State Fair. Our concentrated extra efforts with grounds beautification, cleanliness, customer service, free entertainment and comfort areas have enhanced the fair. As a result, the Ohio State Fair attracts approximately 900,000 visitors during its 12-day run.

The Ohio State Fair notably boasts exhibitors from each of Ohio's 88 counties. Whether they are young people exhibiting a 4-H public speaking project, showcasing their junior FFA livestock exhibits, or participating in the many open arts, cooking or horticultural competitions, they are able to showcase their work in the state's largest spotlight. These outstanding Ohioans annual exhibit approximately 12,000 junior livestock entries, 12,500 open livestock projects and 14,000 entries in our numerous other competitions.

Our current GRF funding represents slightly more than 2 percent of our annual budget, which is sustained primarily by year-round event rentals and State Fair revenue streams, such as ticket sales and sponsorships. The GRF funding is directly allocated to our youth programs, helping to fund a portion of the awards and premiums presented to young Ohioans exhibiting their projects at the state level.

Our agency is incredibly fortunate to have strong partnerships with many state agencies and community groups. We are thankful to work closely with the Ohio Department of Agriculture, the Ohio Department of Development Services, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the Ohio Department of Public Safety, the Ohio Department of Transportation, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, The Ohio State University, the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation and Ohio's diverse agricultural commodity groups. These relationships have helped the Ohio State Fair continue to serve as a premier showcase at which Ohio's businesses and industries can highlight products including agriculture and green initiatives to help foster growth within the state.

One of the primary reasons a Fair is successful is good weather. Good weather, our excellent staff, and the support that we receive from Governor DeWine and the Ohio Legislature help to make the Ohio State Fair one of the country's greatest expositions. We are very proud of our accomplishments of producing a great State Fair and celebrating everything our great state has to offer.

Senators, thank you for the opportunity to share this information with you today. I am available for your questions.



GENERAL GOVERNMENT  
AND AGENCY REVIEW  
COMMITTEE

Witness Form

Today's Date May 1, 2019

Name: Virgil Strickler

Address: 717 E 17th Avenue  
Columbus, Ohio 43211

Telephone: 614-644-4202

Organization Representing: Ohio Expositions Commission

Testifying on Bill Number: H.B. 166

Testimony:  Verbal  Written  Both

Testifying As:  Proponent  Opponent  Interested Party

Are you a Registered Lobbyist?  Yes  No

Special Requests: \_\_\_\_\_  
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