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TO: Chair Oelslager
Vice Chair Plummer
Ranking Member Crawley
RE: FY2022- State Budget – House Bill 110
FROM: Jerry L. Miller, Ph.D. - Ohio University
Chair, Outreach Program of Ohio Debate Commission
DATE: March 16, 2021

Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, and Ranking Member Crawley—I thank you for allowing me this opportunity to share my support to include funding for the Ohio Debate Commission in House Bill 110. I am Jerry Miller, Professor in the School of Communication Studies at Ohio University and Chair of the Outreach Committee of the Ohio Debate Commission.

Public discourse has defined my career in higher education, and I am proud to be a founding member of the Ohio Debate Commission that has as its mission “to foster fair and substantive debates that encourage participation in our democracy.” The Ohio Debate Commission recognizes the fundamental role of “participation” in democracy, both in terms of debating candidates vying for support and the audience to whom the responsibility falls to weigh evidence, assess appropriateness, and cast a ballot in support of a candidate or cause.

Well-planned and accessible debates and forums are important events that enable voters to have their concerns addressed by political leaders and candidates running for office. Moreover, such events give candidates an opportunity to disseminate information, share and critique evidence, and express differing ideologies—fundamental actions that support the democratic process and provide voters with the information they need to make informed choices at the ballot box.

Much research and news coverage of political debates has focused on presidential debates and much of this information points to the viability of these events as providing information to constituents. A distinct difference between the national events and local and state-wide campaigns--candidate or issue--is the significance of place. When running for office or discussing legislation, the constituents are neighbors, the soccer coach, or our child’s or grandchild’s teacher. And the topics of concern are in our front-yard. Consequently, we should seek out more opportunities to come together and discuss the concerns all Ohioans face.

A goal of the Ohio Debate Commission is to encourage more of opportunities for citizens to engaged with their elected officials at all levels of the electoral process—to make it a norm to take part in open dialogue with candidates running for office or vetting legislation.

My interest in debate and public address stems from my childhood in Kansas and participating in public speaking events in 4-H and my school's speech and debate program. Those early activities opened the door to collegiate speech and debate both as a competitor and coach for 18-years, most recently at Ohio University (Director of Speech and Debate from 1996 to 2005)—GO Bobcats!

I have benefited personally and professional by my involvement in academic debates. These skills are important far beyond educational practice. A fundamental skill and practice is to keep the audience in mind, to recognize their needs, and to accompany them in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding. Such activities are certainly more than a competition.

State funding will provide consistent support in our efforts to bring more Ohioans to the table and to share their concerns while simultaneously giving our elected officials an opportunity to discusses plans that impact the daily lives of their constituents.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to advocate for funding for the Ohio Debate Commission to be included in HB 110. I appreciate your consideration and I look forward to future conversations.