



OHIO NEWS MEDIA ASSOCIATION | 1335 DUBLIN ROAD, SUITE 216-B | COLUMBUS OH 43215
MONICA NIEPORTE, PRESIDENT & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Testimony of Monica Nieporte
Ohio News Media Association
House Bill 110 – State Operating Budget
Senate Finance Committee

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 110. My name is Monica Nieporte, and I am the President and Executive Director of the Ohio News Media Association. I am here today to highlight a few provisions in House Bill 110 that impact my members and to share some perspective on a proposed amendment that would promote government transparency.

House Bill 110, *as passed by the House*, includes language codifying the Ohio Checkbook website maintained by the Treasurer of State. Since its creation nearly a decade ago, the Ohio Checkbook has become a very useful tool for reporters seeking spending information from state agencies and local governments. Not only has Ohio Checkbook proven to be a national model of government transparency, it has likely saved local governments countless hours of work complying with routine public records requests for spending data now easily available online.

Additionally, House Bill 110 includes a six-month extension of temporary law allowing public bodies to meet virtually. Over the past year, this provision has allowed governmental entities to continue their important work in a safe and transparency manner. While we are starting to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, I think it is sound public policy to extend this provision through December 31st, 2021. House Bill 110 also includes language granting trustees of a public university or community college as well as the State Teachers Retirement System the ability to attend meetings via teleconference or videoconference. While it is always preferable for members of any public body to attend a meeting in person, this language ensures there is still a physical meeting space for members of the public and a majority of members of the board are in attendance.

Finally, I am asking for the Senate to adopt amendment SC-3275, which was submitted for consideration into the substitute bill last week. Amendment SC-3275 largely resembles Senate Bill 293 (133rd), which passed this chamber unanimously last year. The amendment would expand the current public records mediation program under the Ohio Court of Claims to include open meetings complaints. Since its creation five years ago, this process has emerged as a national model for the speedy and fair resolution to public records complaints. Thanks to this program, we have kept hundreds of cases out of Common Pleas Court and improved citizen and media access to government.

Amendment SC-3275 also includes changes from SB 293 requested by local government groups to ensure that the Court of Claims cannot invalidate a decision of a public body if the Special Master finds that the open meetings law was not followed. We feel this is a fair concession and ensures the Court of Claims is focused on routine and simplistic complaints. By adopting this amendment, Ohio will continue to be a leader in government transparency.

In closing, I want to thank the members of the committee for the thoughtful consideration of these matters. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.