



Broadcast Educational Media Commission FY 22-23 Budget
Testimony before the Senate Workforce & Higher Education Committee
Presented by Geoffrey A. Phillips, Executive Director

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Williams, members of the Senate Workforce & Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today regarding the FY 22-23 operating budget for the Broadcast Educational Media Commission.

My name is Geoffrey A. Phillips and it is my privilege to serve the citizens of Ohio as the Executive Director of the Broadcast Educational Media Commission.

Broadcast Educational Media Commission – known in state government circles as BEMC – serves an important role in **connectivity**.

There are three partners allowing Ohioans to connect with state government activities:

- **The Ohio Channel** along with the **Statehouse News Bureau**
- **BEMC**
- **Ohio Public Broadcasters**

Inside the Statehouse to State Senators and State Representatives there is familiarity with Dan Shellenbarger and **The Ohio Channel** team, as well as, Karen Kasler and the **Statehouse News Bureau** team.

To Ohioans, there is familiarity with **Ohio Public Broadcasting Partners** – a **Public TV** station like WOSU here in Columbus or perhaps WVIZ ideastream in Cleveland or a **Public Radio Station** like WDPR in downtown Dayton or WYSU at Youngstown State University or **Radio Reading Services** affiliates like WEYE in Akron or WRRS in Cincinnati – built out across Ohio they include 11 Public TV stations, 15 Public Radio Stations and 6 Radio Reading Services.

Connecting The Ohio Channel and the Ohio Public Broadcasting Partners is BEMC. As an independent state agency, BEMC is the state funding source to all of these entities, provides access to the fiber connections across Ohio and serves to support the Ohio Public TV stations as a Joint

Master Control.

Dan and Karen and their teams have the expertise to tell Ohioans the state government story, while the Ohio Public Broadcasters have the experience and expertise to share the messages with Ohioans along with providing other educational content.

Over the past 14 months, these three have answered multiple calls to share important health and government news with Ohioans – always finding a way to say yes.

Just as freedom is not free, these entities need funds to continue to be able to say yes so Ohioans have access to important State government messages and educational programming opportunities, while allowing BEMC to connect the interdependent entities.

BEMC applauds The Ohio Channel, Statehouse News Bureau and the Ohio Public Broadcasters for stepping up in the midst of the public health threat.

When the new normal world settles in and historians analyze these last 14 months, perhaps one of the reflections will be a new enlightenment for the State of Ohio's return on prior investments.

One might humbly suggest among the list of returns on prior investments will be the State's 60-year investment in Public Broadcasting.

Building on the investments of a statewide fiber connectivity system – known as OARnet – the Ohio Academic Research Network – BEMC *connects* the fiber network with Ohio Public TV stations in a Public TV network built out under a role given from the Ohio legislature in 1960. This foundation was expanded to include Ohio Public Radio stations to reach virtually every Ohioan along with adding Ohio Radio Reading Services for the visually impaired: all linked and *connected* under what today is BEMC.

During the Pandemic what did this interdependent network allow the three branches of State government – the Judiciary, the Legislative and the Executive – to do?

- **Ohio Supreme Court** – was able to hear testimony virtually with

Justices in separate locations and those testifying in locations across Ohio

- **Ohio Legislature** – Senate and House Committees met virtually to review the Pandemic response. While multiple committee rooms and Statehouse spaces were connected to allow the House and Senate to hold sessions, and the State’s Controlling Board met numerous times broadcast live with members able to stay safely in their homes around Ohio
- **Secretary of State** – in preparation for the November Presidential Election, numerous Election officials gathered from around Ohio via virtual connections allowing Ohioans to watch and listen
- **Governor & Ohio Department of Health** – important health messages outlining the State’s response to COVID-19 became at times a daily highlight for Ohioans
- **Ohio Board of Education** – was able to continue to function via monthly virtual meetings held via live streaming. Importantly and in addition, Ohio PBS Learning at Home programming gave important education options to Ohio parents and students as schools adjusted to virtual learning
- **Seasonal Statehouse Events** – while Ohio school choirs could not share Holiday singing at the Statehouse, Ohioans were able to hear the musical presentations via this broadcast alternative. In addition, a number of events annually held in the Atrium became first time virtual live stream events

These are just a few examples of countless returns on the prior investments.

Who were the interdependent partners in bringing these virtual broadcast and live stream events to Ohioans?

- **The Ohio Channel**, known in the state budget as Ohio Governmental Telecommunications, provides the prime *production* along with assistance from the Statehouse News Bureau for government news content
- **Broadcast Educational Media Commission** – the arm *connecting* The Ohio Channel with Ohio’s Public Broadcasters. BEMC is a team of professionals housed north of downtown in a facility where the

lights have never gone out during the Pandemic as broadcasting continued 24/7/365

- **Ohio's Alliance of Public Broadcasters** known as the *broadcast* team combining Ohio's Public TV stations, Ohio's Public Radio stations and Ohio's Radio Reading Services – stretching across Ohio to reach virtually – literally and figuratively – every Ohioan.

In our advance materials we gave you a one-page overview of the Optimal Budget the BEMC Commissioners are requesting the Senate use to adjust the appropriations for BEMC and our Public Broadcasting partners.

Mr. Chairman, if I may, I call the Committee's attention to the requests:

- **The Statehouse News Bureau** requests \$27,132 to expand telling the Statehouse news story
- **Ohio's Public Broadcasters** took a nearly *\$750,000 reduction* in the State's Set Aside of appropriations requests in FY 21 and *requests restoration* along with funds to further support educating Ohioans for a request of \$688,474 per Fiscal Year, and
- **BEMC** requests an addition of just over \$100,000 over the two Fiscal Years in support of the Joint Master Control for Ohio Public TV.
- **The Ohio Channel** – while receiving an additional \$211,000 for each Fiscal Year in the Substitute House Bill -- encourages your support of the live streaming of House & Senate Committee sessions by fully supporting the requests for these other three interdependent partners.

Mr. Chairman and Committee Members, while I respectfully yield our remaining time to Ohio Channel Executive Director Dan Shellenbarger my written comments provide you and the Committee additional insights about the three interdependent members of this unique Broadcast platform.

I will be available for questions after Dan's presentation.

Insights about BEMC

Public Educational Television came to Ohio in 1954 and, as a result of a 1960 legislative study, the Ohio Educational Television Network Commission became a state entity in 1961. Over the past 60 years, the agency has had five unique names and yet one constant – public educational broadcasting.

Broadcast Educational Media Commission, our name since 2013, seeks to expand the knowledge of Ohio's citizens through promotion of educational broadcasting products, funding of the state's broadcast affiliates and organizations, and collaboration with stakeholders and advocates for technology-driven education.

BEMC has:

- A Commission of 11 members and a staff of 22
- A 24-hour / 7 days a week / 365 days a year operation
- Memorandums of Understanding to support Ohio's 11 public TV stations, 15 public radio stations and six radio reading services
- Connection capability to link Ohio K-20 classrooms through live learning and content.
- Collaborations with the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Public TV stations to create a series of education-based multimedia videos in support of interactive learning
- Joint Master Control (JMC) operation for Ohio's public television stations making BEMC one of the most technologically advanced public operations in the US
- Partnerships with many educational initiatives including serving on the Ohio Open Educational Resources Collaborative with InfOhio, and being a leader in the Ohio Distance Learning Association

What we are doing at BEMC is the definition of "good government". By utilizing the most up-to-date technologies, centralizing and modernizing operations, becoming a leader within the world of educational broadcasting, and embracing the state's goal of IT Optimization and Innovation, BEMC is serving as great stewards of taxpayer money while building for the future.

The FY 22-23 budget as presented is a strategic investment in the future of education in Ohio in both public broadcasting and remote learning.

BEMC's budget consists of two areas: **operational and subsidy**. The operational budget supports the everyday functions of the organization including educational broadcasting and interactive video conferencing operations and equipment, facility expenditures, and administrative costs.

The Governor's recommendation of **\$3,738,449** in FY 22 and **\$3,766,191** FY23 will allow us to **maintain our current operations**, and yet stress BEMC to **build on our recent advancements and build for the future** – such as the recent expansion in coverage of Ohio House and Senate committee meetings. Our staff structure provides for ensuring our 24/7/365 operation is fully covered to provide the best level of service to Ohio's public television stations, while upgrading equipment to ensure high-quality programming reaches all corners of the Buckeye state, day or night.

While we appreciate a budget recommendation allowing an increase in Operating Funds over FY 20-21 there is a need for additional operating expenses at BEMC to meet the expenses of our 24/7/365 operation. Our commission requested an "Optimal Budget" - see attachment in the materials sent in advance of today's presentation - for FY 22-23 with numbers that reflect our actual operational need. This "Optimal Budget" for BEMC is a total increase against the proposed budget of **\$145,736 in FY 22 and \$117,994 in FY 23**. Details of the "Optimal Budget" – net of increases in the Substitute House Bill – are included with my testimony.

The subsidy budget distributes funds to public television, public radio, and radio reading services across the state. BEMC works with each station through a memorandum of understanding for those funds and distributes those funds based on an agreed to formula each year after a financial report for the previous year details how those funds were used to benefit Ohioans.

The Governor's recommendation of **\$3,222,000** in both FY22 and FY23 will stretch public educational broadcasting in Ohio to simply maintain current operations. This recommendation represents a nearly \$750,000 reduction from current appropriations from the group responsible to send audio and video signals to the homes, vehicles and mobile devices of Ohioans. Comments from the Ohio Alliance for Public Broadcasting detail this challenge for your consideration.

Of note in the subsidy budget are funds for **Ohio Governmental Telecommunications**, including *The Ohio Channel*, and **Statehouse News Bureau**.

The Statehouse News Bureau is a non-partisan, professional news organization covering the statehouse and ensuring the citizens of Ohio are well-informed about state government. I'm sure many of you have talked with Bureau Chief Karen Kasler at some point during your statehouse tenure and understand the inherent value in having this reliable news source around Capitol Square.

Ohio Governmental Telecommunications, *The Ohio Channel*, is the broadcast entity you

are most likely familiar with. The Ohio Channel produces live House and Senate sessions and committee hearings, for all Ohioans to have open access to state government.

Additionally, the “Optimal Budget” includes funds for both OGT and Statehouse News Bureau. The requested increase for OGT **totals \$210,426 in both FY 22 and 23** and is necessary to improve the technical and staffing levels to meet the needs of growing the broadcasting of House and Senate committees through the Ohio Channel. The increase for the Statehouse News Bureau is a modest **\$55,025 in both FY 22 and 23** to allow for greater non-partisan news coverage of state government.

Also included in the “Optimal Budget” is a request for greater support of **\$1,355,705 in both FY 22 and 23** for subsidies to Ohio’s public TV, Radio and Radio Reading Services and educational multi-media grants. Public media across the state of Ohio provides invaluable educational and local community content and restoring funding to previous levels will allow public media to continue to expand their offerings. Read more about this request in comments from the Alliance for Ohio’s Public Broadcasters.

When the Broadcast Educational Media Commission and our public educational broadcasting partners embarked on the journey of modernizing our system of delivery and created one of the largest and most innovative public joint master control operations in the country it was a declaration from the State of Ohio that this investment in educational broadcasting was vital to the citizens of the state.

The future of education is in media, multi-media, and online platforms – technology – and BEMC is positioned as a leader in educational broadcasting technology. With this budget we can continue this innovative path, become a model for educational broadcasting in the country, and expand our educational opportunities of all Ohioans.

In conclusion, educational technology, including educational broadcasting and remote learning is the future. Technology is not a replacement for traditional education, but a supplement. Whether that is Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood, Downton Abbey, Antiques Roadshow or a locally produced show on Ohio’s public television stations, reading aloud from local newspapers to thousands of visually impaired persons, a series of videos created to help parents understand an IEP or the Third Grade Reading Guarantee shared in an online platform, a teacher in Columbus teaching Mandarin Chinese to a group of high school students in rural Ohio through interactive video conferencing, this is the future of education.

The Broadcast Educational Media Commission will continue to be one of many leading the way as the State of Ohio modernizes and energizes the future of education for all students and for all Ohioans.

Thank you again, Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Workforce & Higher Education Committee for reading these thoughts.