



Celebrating 250 Years of American Independence

**Proponent Testimony for SCR 5
Todd Kleismit, Executive Director**

**Hon. Kristina Roegner, Chairwoman
Senate Government Oversight Committee
June 7, 2023**

Chairwoman Roegner, Vice Chair Antani and Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of Senate Concurrent Resolution 5 and to share my perspective as the executive director about the work of the Ohio Commission for the U.S. Semiquincentennial, which I will refer to as America 250-Ohio. I want to start by thanking your Senate colleagues who serve on our Commission, Senators Lang and Craig. We consider the members of the Ohio General Assembly as critical stakeholders on this journey toward 2026 and SCR 5 is a great statement to solidify our partnership.

The American 250-Ohio Commission is leading Ohio's efforts to prepare the state to participate in the nation's 250th anniversary, which culminates on July 4, 2026. Our charge is spelled out in ORC Section 149.309 to "... plan, encourage, develop, and coordinate the commemoration of the two hundred fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United States and the impact of Ohioans on the nation's past, present, and future." Last fall we produced a report, "Recommendations to the People of Ohio," which is in front of you now. This publication will give you a detailed perspective on how we're approaching the upcoming celebration and commemoration of the United States and Ohio's place in those national stories.

Every state is in the early stages of forming a commission (or similar body) to participate in the nation's 250th anniversary in ways that make sense in the context of each state. Having participated in several national convenings of America 250 leaders across the country – both in-person and in virtual – I want to share with you that Ohio is toward the front of the pack in many respects. As expected, states like Virginia and Pennsylvania are embracing this "America 250 opportunity" fully and comprehensively. My observations are that they are leading the national effort. But I will also say that Ohio is well positioned to be a leader in this effort based on things like the prominent citizens serving on our Commission, the amount of support of the governor, legislature and what has been produced up to this point. The "Recommendations to the People of Ohio" is a great example of how serious we are taking our work, the amount of

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engagement that has already happened and the substantive nature of the ideas contained in the report.

Ohio has a unique place in the history of our country. We set the template for the nation's growth and can be considered the first truly American state. The first 13 states were, of course, British colonies before American independence. The next three states – Vermont, Kentucky and Tennessee – were carved out of those former British colonies. Ohio sprang first among the states created whole cloth from the young nation's Northwest Territory as part of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, a key, but lesser-known founding document. As America's 17th state, Ohio thus became an American original and the template for an aspiring, growing new nation.

Governor DeWine is fond of saying that "This is Ohio's Time" and we could not agree more. The America 250-Ohio Commission is now among the national leaders on the journey toward 2026. While our efforts will be grounded in Ohio's contributions to national history, we have a larger opportunity to remind ourselves and our fellow Americans about the multitude of contributions Ohio and Ohioans have made these past 250 + years. Business innovation, arts, sports, literature, culture, manufacturing, transportation and all the Ohio originals. Astronauts, presidents, Lake Erie, and the Ohio River. Ohio is such a content-rich environment for opportunities exactly like this 250th anniversary celebration to tell Ohio's unique and compelling story. I often tell people that if we are good at what we do, if we have the resources to do it well, our impacts will far outlive the Commission and 2026. Ready or not, the nation's 250th is coming. Let's be sure Ohio maximizes this once-in-a-generation opportunity.

Thank you for your consideration and support of SCR 5. I would be delighted to answer any questions you have of me this afternoon.

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Todd Kleismit, *Executive Director*

Ohio Commission for the U.S. Semiquincentennial