



April 24, 2023

The Honorable Jerry Cirino
1 Capitol Square
Ground Floor 034
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Good morning, Chair Cirino, Vice-Chair Rulli, and Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, my name is Megan Wood and I have the privilege of serving as the Executive Director and CEO of the Ohio History Connection. I am here today to offer testimony on House Bill 33, the State's Main Operating Budget, and in particular the line items that involve the Ohio History Connection and our work throughout the state.

For background, the Ohio History Connection, formerly the Ohio Historical Society, is a statewide history organization with the mission to spark discovery of Ohio's stories, to embrace the present, share the past, and transform the future. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization chartered in 1885, the Ohio History Connection carries out history services for Ohio and its citizens focused on preserving and sharing the state's history. This includes housing the State Historic Preservation Office, the official state archives, educational and community outreach and managing more than 50 sites and museums across Ohio.

Today I'd like to focus on a few points of the work of the Ohio History Connection, specifically the upcoming World Heritage sites, the work of the Ohio State Historic Preservation Office, and our network of historic sites. My overall message today is that the Ohio History Connection seeks to be the historical organization that Ohioans deserve as supported by the proposed budget included in House Bill 33. We can maintain and make better a site system and a set of programs that improve Ohio's communities - by bringing people together, cultivating pride, or encouraging economic development.

Currently, in House Bill 33, there is a proposed overall increase for line items specifically involving the Ohio History Connection by 29.2% in FY 24 and by an additional 16.4% in FY 25. These line items make up our main operating budget and directly fund and support our day-to-day operations. I mention this because there are many line items that are underneath the Ohio History Connection that do not contribute to our operating budget and pass through to our partners or commissions that fall under our heading and also are important to Ohio history writ large- the Ohio Holocaust Commission, the American-250 in Ohio Commission, history grants

that have long supported important history organizations in the state like the Western Reserve Historical Society and the Cincinnati Museum Center.

I'd like to shift gears a bit here and talk about World Heritage and our Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks. 2,000 years ago, the ancestors of today's American Indian people gathered in the Ohio Valley and built massive structures from earth aligned to the cycles of the sun and the moon. The artifacts at these sites were brought from around the continent- obsidian from what we know today as Yellowstone National Park, shell from the Gulf of Mexico, copper from the upper Great Lakes. Today we are privileged in Ohio to steward these remarkable places. These are globally significant sites in a nomination to be voted on by the World Heritage Committee in September that are reflected in UNESCO World Heritage Sites (360402) line item.

As Governor DeWine stated in his inaugural address, "this is a big deal!" And we certainly agree with that. World Heritage designation is the highest recognition that a site can receive globally and would put our Ohio sites on the list with places like the Great Pyramid of Giza and the Roman Colosseum. We are confident that come September, Ohio will have its first World Heritage Site, the 25th World Heritage site in the nation and that it will be a big deal for our state. We look forward to welcoming the world to Ohio and the eight sites that across Licking, Ross, and Warren Counties. As for the line item, there is \$1.2 million proposed in FY 24 and thanks to the Ohio House Finance Committee for including an increase of \$1.2 million in FY 25, bringing the overall total to \$1.6 million in FY 25. This will allow us to prepare the sites for increased visitors, both from a maintenance standpoint, but also staffing and marketing purposes. The economic impact of this designation will be felt for years to come for our state, not just the World Heritage Site.

Shifting from World Heritage, I'd like to turn our attention to an example of community and economic development driven by preserving and utilizing historic buildings. In downtown Youngstown, there have been multiple Ohio Historic Preservation Tax Credit projects on federal square. These buildings have been revived and are being used for multiple commercial and residential uses- like apartments in the Youngstown Realty building, or the restaurant and hotel in the Stambaugh building. This is the type of work we facilitate through the Ohio State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

The Ohio State Historic Preservation Office has been housed in our organization since its creation. As Ohioans we can be proud of the high production and quality that comes from our SHPO. We have over 3800 listings on the National Register of Historic Places, the designation that is the first step in many programs including federal historic tax credits and our Ohio Historic Preservation Tax Credit (OHPTC) program.

We work on both of these projects with the National Parks Service (NPS) and they recently provided some data:

For federal FY2022, Ohio ranked #1 in the country for Part 1 applications- making the determination that a building is indeed historic, the first step in the tax credit process and also #1 in the country for Part 2 applications- where the SHPO works to get proposed worked approved by NPS. This is thanks in large part to the tremendous support historic tax credits have in Ohio,

including through the OHPTC program (most of our projects apply for both the federal and state historic tax credits) and the commitment that applicants and the Ohio SHPO staff have in working together to get buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places and submitting projects to NPS that are in conformance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, and thus that can be successfully approved. These numbers show that a lot of historic buildings are being saved, recognized, and sensitively rehabilitated in Ohio.

This year, Ohio also ranked #1 in the country for total estimated Qualified Rehabilitation Expenditures at \$1,386,652,810. This number represents the investment being made in historic buildings (and by extension communities) across our state.

The line item for Ohio State Historic Preservation Office (360504) which is seeing a notable increase in FY 24. The increase in FY 24 is relative to matching funds that the state is providing to our office based off what our office has received in federal dollars. NPS provides federal funding to each SHPO office, which is supposed to be a 40% state and 60% federal split. The amount in the Governor's proposed budget gets us within \$100K of meeting the match. Ohio is in the midst of great economic growth and these increased funds for the historic preservation line ensure we can quickly review and assist projects with federal funds and be of service to projects that are being developed utilizing historic preservation tax credits and the federal and state level.

Many of the line items in our budget relate to staffing, preserving, and maintaining a network of sites across the state. Line items 360501 and 360502 and are foundational for everything we do at the Ohio History Connection. A large part of these line items pays our staff that care for our collections, share history through programming, staff and maintain our vast historic site network. We recently conducted a study on salaries for our employees and the results of that study showed that there is a gap of about \$1.3 million on where we should be at in paying our staff versus where we are currently. The increases in these line items assist us in our effort to be more competitive in the market and ensure that we are able to retain and recruit talented staff to work at all our sites throughout the state and deliver memorable experiences for Ohioans of all ages.

As it relates to our site system, per the Ohio Revised Code, we are required to maintain and preserve historical sites throughout the state. Currently, there are 58 sites that we have been tasked to manage. 360502 serves as the line item where we are able to perform those duties authorized to us the ORC. Additionally, the National Afro American Museum and Cultural Center, and the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Museums and Library have separate lines for those sites. However, we have many sites that need more staffing and need more maintenance in order for us to continue our mission of maintaining and preserving Ohio history. More importantly, ensuring that all of our historic sites are something that residents of those areas and visitors alike can be proud of. The increase to this line item is a great start and we are appreciative of it, but the increase in FY 24 and FY 25 are divided up by 58 sites statewide and therefore may not have the transformative impact that we were seeking in our initial request. Contained in line 360502, \$3 M that is spent directly in local communities throughout the state. Our site system is largely managed through the collaboration of a management partner, a local organization that is responsible for daily operations while we maintain responsibility for large-

scale maintenance, capital projects, collections, and exhibits. In seeking any increase in this line, we seek increase the dollars that go back to over 50 communities in 40 counties across Ohio.

As an illustration, the Armstrong Air and Space Museum Association is a private non-profit that has been the management partner for the Armstrong Air and Space Museum in Wapakoneta since 2008. This organization employs 14 people and serves over 40,000 visitors annually. They leverage the state dollars that we pass on to them to raise funds for projects in addition to admission and programming dollars. Last year, the association installed a Lear Jet that Neil Armstrong broke records on the museum grounds and celebrated the museum's 50th anniversary. Investments the state makes in 360502 are investments in many organizations like the Armstrong Air and Space Museum Association that make it possible for Ohio to have such a large and varied historic site network.

Line item 360401 relates to the Ohio Commission for the U.S. Semiquincentennial or America 250 – Ohio. This is Ohio's opportunity to tell our Ohio story as it relates to the founding and growth of our country dating back to 1776. The money set aside here will play a huge role in setting the stage for a wonderful and appropriate celebration of our nation in 2026 when we will mark 250 years of independence. While we are aware that there is currently a discrepancy between levels of funding from Governor DeWine's proposed operating budget and what the House has currently proposed for this commission, we want to underscore our support for the work of the America 250 – Ohio Commission. It is our understanding that the America 250 – Ohio Commission's Executive Director Todd Kleismit will testify in front of this committee to go into further detail about their plans.

The line item for the Holocaust and Genocide Memorial and Education Commission falls under our part of the proposed budget in HB 33. The House has included a sizable increase in funding in FY 24 and FY 25. This new funding level will assist this the commission in their efforts to gather and disseminate Holocaust and Genocide information and help promote awareness of these issues. It is our understanding that the Commission's Executive Director, Andrea Brookover, has been invited to testify in front of this committee as well.

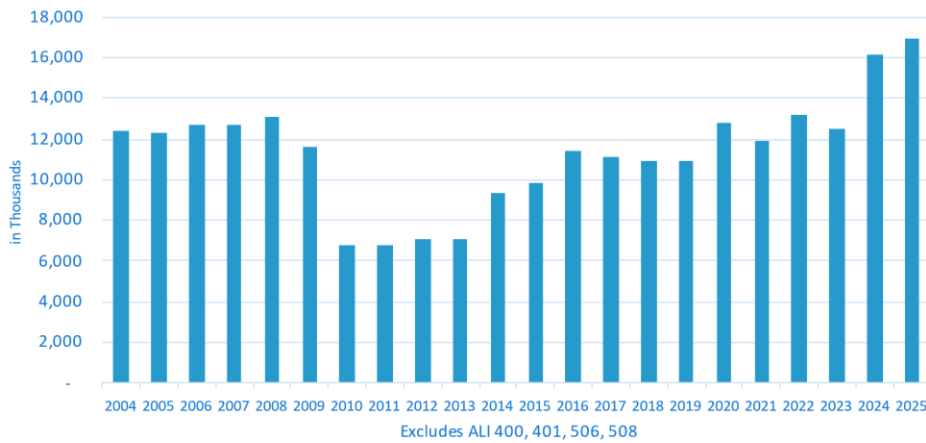
One non-line item portion of House Bill 33 that I want to draw your attention to is the new ORC Section 149.3010. Our office worked with members of the Ohio House to draft this language for the purposes of repatriation of American Indian human remains. The Ohio History Connection has been working diligently with our federally recognized-tribal partners on how best to handle and care for American Indian human remains. The language proposed in House Bill 33 will allow our office the flexibility – and removes potential hurdles – to begin the process of repatriation of American Indian human remains and respecting the wishes of our federally-recognized tribal partners.

As I conclude my testimony, I do want to thank each of you for your time and attention to the proposed budget for the Ohio History Connection in House Bill 33. While this may seem like a large increase in funding for our organization, the reality of what is proposed is that this new funding amount for FY 24 and increased in FY 25 will get our organization back to where we funded in 2008. With inflationary pressures on the entire economy, we advocate for these budget numbers so that we can employ a talented workforce that can move our site system from

surviving to thriving. While our real dollars have increased over the last 15 years, the loss due to inflation has an impact on our ability to pay staff and site management partners what is needed to be the history organization Ohio deserves, but we are optimistic about the future. [See charts below] This investment with the state and my commitment to you all to be aggressive and strategic in seeking private and grant funding, we will work with our partners to show just how incredible Ohio's stories are. We certainly appreciate the increase and know that our work is only beginning in making Ohio's site system the best in the country as well as ensuring that our state's archives is properly stored and maintained for future generations.

Thank you, Chair Cirino, for the opportunity to address the Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee. I look forward to any questions you or members of the committee may have.

Net GRF to OHC
FY2004 to FY2025 Governor's Proposal



Net GRF to OHC in Today's Dollars

