

Ohio Government Telecommunications FY 2024-2025 Budget Testimony
Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Dr. Dan Shellenbarger, Executive Director, OGT

Chairmain Cirino, Vice Chairman Rulli, Ranking Member and Minority Whip Smith, and committee members thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Dr. Dan Shellenbarger, and I serve as the Executive Director of OGT/The Ohio Channel. I am here today to support the budget submitted to you by the Broadcast Educational Media Commission and endorsed by the Alliance for Public Telecommunications. Our state support is included in the overall BEMC budget.

You are all incredibly busy, which means we are busy. This is not a part-time legislature. This is an overtime legislature. Three years ago, we were invited to cover all of the committees. This was done in January 2020. We were in the middle of a fiscal year. We were able to scramble and add several new control rooms and solve how to handle the increased coverage. Since then, we have only added the number of events we cover. We haven't been able to add staff to assist with coverage. We need three new staff positions to ensure we can cover events now and in the future. At the start of this year, the Senate provided temporary funds, which allowed us to add two staff until July of this year so we could have the staff needed to cover all of the expected committee meetings during this budget season. **The House restored our request of an additional \$285,745 to our budget appropriation in the last General Assembly. We are asking you to keep these funds in our budget request.** These funds make a crucial difference in what we can and cannot cover. These funds will allow us to add three staff (we will make our 2 temporary employees permanent and add an additional full-time staff person) and pay for the extra storage and backups for the additional coverage.

Numbers do not lie. For the 132 GA (for the years 2017-2018), we covered 821 hours of meetings. During this past GA, we covered 2,636 hours. That is a three-fold increase. To note, a year of this coverage was during the pandemic when meetings were limited by the rooms available due to Covid restrictions. There have been days where we have covered 13 concurrent events. We regularly have days where we end up covering more than 20 events. We do not have the staff to do this.

We are not in a position, nor do we want to be in a position to say no to coverage. We have days when we do not have the staff to cover all events. During these days, we have used one staff member to cover two events. This never goes well.

We do more than cover all official events of the legislature. We are the only state in the Union where the media staff also perform media services for all three branches of government. We work with the various caucus staff to help members cut public service announcements, cover and distribute press conferences, and produce training videos. The Ohio Channel staff is busy producing educational videos on our state's history, culture, and art when we are not covering multiple official events.

We also save the state millions of dollars by working with state agencies to help them with their media production needs. Everyone knows the high cost of television production. We offer our services free to help other agencies that don't have the budget for production but need media materials.

People are watching. We are distributed statewide by Ohio Public Media. We know that viewers who tune in to their local PBS station to watch The Ohio Channel number in the millions. Online we have more than 3 million viewers.

Through your generous support, we have built a public media system unlike any other in the United States. OGT/The Ohio Channel does not work in isolation. We rely on the operations of BEMC and the broadcast from the eight public media stations across the state. Together with the Statehouse News Bureau, we provide the daily vital functions of keeping the state informed and educated. Our close cooperation and integration allow us to be careful stewards of our public funding. Our products are unbiased truthful information to help Ohioans understand the complex operations of government. The Ohio Channel, BEMC, Ohio Public Media Stations, and the Statehouse News Bureau have had a long history of commitment to the goal of keeping the Ohio public informed. This collective system is unlike any state in the nation.

The PBS brand is continuously voted as America's most trusted source of public affairs information. OGT and, subsequently, the state benefit from this brand identification. We are constantly looking for cheaper ways to operate. BEMC has been instrumental in helping us program the Ohio Channel and keep us on air. We partnered with the Legislative Information Service to provide web development and streaming. Capitol Square Board provides us with our facility space and its required maintenance.

Our reach is significant. Because of the network, we are available, in some form, in every single household across the state. All of our official coverage is immediately archived forever and readily accessible to anyone with a computer or mobile device--all text searchable.

This is a time when so many different organizations are clamoring for so few dollars. Our system is indeed an investment. Funding us at our requested amounts will ensure this investment continues to deliver returns. Information is power. We want to help Ohio and Ohioans stay powerful with information.

Additional Ohio Government Telecommunications Information

OGT Stats

Ohiochannel.org views (since 2015):	53,948,938
Senate video-only views (since 2015):	3,753,421
OGT total video hours:	27,540
OGT total videos:	24,186

OGT Hours Produced by GA

131 GA (2015-2016)	371 hours
132 GA (2017-2018)	821 hours
133 GA (2019-2020)	2,065 hours
134 GA (2021-2022)	2,636 hours

OGT Services

The Ohio Channel

OGT, in conjunction with Ohio Public Media, manages The Ohio Channel, which is distributed on the available digital broadcast signals from public broadcasting stations statewide through the BEMC facility. This is the only channel dedicated to Ohio government, public affairs, culture, and history.

OhioChannel.org

Anyone can watch Legislative events, Supreme Court sessions, and Governor's events live on our website. All footage is archived and is searchable. The site also features educational programming, including *Remarkable Ohio*, which tracks the more than 1,200 historical markers around the state, vast programming archives from the Ohio Channel, hundreds of interviews with Ohio veterans, outdoor enthusiasts, artists, and writers, and links to all parts of state government.

OGT Facilities

OGT is connected by fiber optics between Capitol Square, OGT Master Control, the Riffe Center, Rhodes Tower, and the Ohio Judicial Center. Elected officials can "go live" from anywhere on the Statehouse campus and be connected to anywhere in the world. OGT also assists with members' programming, PSAs, and other media needs.

The Statehouse News Bureau is a four-person team of journalists covering state policy and politics. We are the only team of broadcasters in Ohio dedicated to coverage of the legislature, the governor, state agencies, the Supreme Court and statewide elections.

We produce both daily stories that are shared with NPR and other public radio stations around the state and a weekly half-hour TV show that airs on PBS stations. Here are some stats:

Statehouse News Bureau Story Counts

861 stories between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020
920 stories between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021
823 stories between July 2, 2021 and June 30, 2022
390 stories so far this fiscal year (July 1, 2022 to February 28, 2023)

(Please be advised that this includes a six-week bereavement leave for Karen and three weeks of parental leave for Andy, so our staffing levels were off by a third for much of the last three months.)

Our stories are also posted to our website www.stateneews.org and are shared with the websites of Ohio's public radio stations. Here are some stats on our website.

Statehouse News Bureau CY 2022 Website Performance Data

Stateneews.org Website Performance

Users: 238,932
Sessions: 314,829
Pageviews: 443,247

Top 5 stories of CY 2022:

- [Federal court intervenes in Ohio redistricting, orders state to implement unconstitutional district maps](#) – 10,334 pageviews
- [Almost half of Ohio Army National Guard aren't COVID vaccinated, can't help with hospital mission](#) – 8,042 pageviews
- [Ohio drivers can now renew their license online](#) – 7,408 pageviews
- [Bill would allow Ohioans to sue over unintended pregnancies](#) – 6,568 pageviews
- [Yes, you can catch COVID-19 multiple times. In fact, people already are.](#) – 4,746 pageviews

Google Search Performance

Total Impressions: 5,654,362
Total Clicks: 122,424

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[Statehouse News Bureau on ideastream.org](#)

Statehouse News Bureau stories that were shared on Ideastream Public Media's website totaled for 58,281 pageviews.