

Testimony of Mike Edwards
The August Chiwy Foundation
House Finance Committee
March 12, 2025

Thank you, Chairman Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla and Ranking Member Sweeney for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony to the House Finance Committee.

My name is Mike Edwards, and I am testifying today on behalf of the Augusta Chiwy Foundation. Unfortunately, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the foundation, Steven Croft, is traveling, otherwise he'd be here before you.

The Augusta Chiwy Foundation was founded in 2015 and exists to promote selfless service of humanity through education and inspiration. They achieve their mission by creating inspirational and award-winning documentary films in conjunction with educational curriculum that will be available at no cost to high school teachers and college professors.

I am testifying today in support of amendment HC0675 to House Bill 96. The amendment will be requesting \$150,000 to support the production of a four-part documentary film called "***A Train Near Magdeburg.***"

A Train Near Magdeburg tells a powerful and deeply moving story from the final days of World War II, when the horrors of the Holocaust collided with the courage of liberation. On April 13, 1945, U.S. soldiers from the 30th Infantry Division stumbled upon a German train stranded near the town of Farsleben, close to Magdeburg. The train carried over 2,500 Jewish prisoners—men, women, and children—who had been evacuated from the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Starving, terrified, and on the brink of death, these individuals were being transported deeper into Nazi-controlled territory as the Third Reich crumbled.

The discovery of the train became a moment of profound humanity. American soldiers, weary from the relentless advance into Nazi territory, took immediate action to rescue the prisoners. They provided food, medical aid, and most importantly, hope to people who had endured unimaginable suffering. For the survivors, this encounter was a turning point, marking the end of their nightmare and the beginning of a long journey toward healing.

This story transcends the historical moment it captures, reminding us of the power of compassion, courage, and the enduring resilience of the human spirit. Survivors of the train have passed their memories on, creating a bridge between the past and the present.

Their testimonies, along with the recollections of the soldiers who liberated them, are at the heart of this project.

I am the film's Director and my goal is to bring this extraordinary story to life through weaving together survivor accounts, historical research, and poignant storytelling. The presentation not only commemorates the heroism of the liberators and the resilience of the survivors but also challenges us to learn from the past. I feel there is a critical importance of preserving stories like these, especially in an age when the firsthand witnesses to the Holocaust are dwindling.

I am a central Ohio native and my company, the 5 Stones Group, is headquartered in Gahanna, Ohio. 5 Stones has won 18 Emmy Awards for our work since their inception in 2002. I had the honor of bringing this project to Governor DeWine's attention in 2023 during a Holocaust & Genocide Commemoration ceremony and the Governor was in attendance when Episode 1 of the documentary was screened at the Riffe Center in May of last year.

In addition, the Augusta Chiwy Foundation is based in Columbus, Ohio but operates worldwide. Sixty percent of our Board Members have worked, lived and raised their families in Ohio.

Other local partners include the Columbus Symphony Orchestra – they have recorded the soundtrack to the film along with world renowned violinist, Joshua Bell. The Central Ohio Performing Arts Association, the Greater Columbus Arts Council and Film Columbus have been incredibly supportive of the project. And interestingly, at least 33 soldiers that liberated the train in 1945 are from Ohio – there are most likely more, and we will be doing more research on this front.

To date, the Augusta Chiwy Foundation has raised nearly \$1.2 million in support of this project from individual donors, corporate donations and various community foundations. An additional \$850,000 needs raised to complete the film and educational components. Receiving funding from the State of Ohio will assist our efforts to close the fundraising gap.

Research shows that films are one of the most effective tools for teaching humanities concepts because they improve retention, engage students emotionally, and encourage social awareness. However, they work best when integrated with discussions, readings, and critical analysis, rather than used in isolation. That's why the Augusta Chiwy Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to producing award-winning films and related curricula that highlight acts of personal heroism.

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THE AUGUSTA CHIWY F O U N D A T I O N



In conclusion, the project aims to inspire future generations to care deeply for others and to recognize the significance of standing against injustice. By keeping these memories alive, we honor those who suffered and those who risked everything to save others. This is more than a history lesson—it's a call to action to uphold the values of empathy, courage, and moral responsibility.

A Train Near Magdeburg reminds us that even in humanity's darkest moments, light can shine through. It is a testament to the importance of preserving history, not only to understand our past but to guide us in building a more compassionate and just future.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Mike Edwards

Mike Edwards
5 Stones Group on behalf of the Augusta Chiwy Foundation



Photo of the train liberation on April 13, 1945 (Courtesy Photo/Clarence Benjamin)

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HC0675

H. B. No. 96

As Introduced

_____ moved to amend as follows:

In the table on line 106461, in row C, delete the first "\$985,000" 1
and insert "\$1,135,000" 2

In the table on line 106401, in rows M and R, add \$150,000 to fiscal 3
year 2026 4

After line 106475, insert: 5

"HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE MEMORIAL AND EDUCATION COMMISSION 6

Of the foregoing appropriation item 360400, Holocaust and Genocide 7
Memorial and Education Commission, \$150,000 in fiscal year 2026 shall be 8
used for the Augusta Chiwy Foundation for the production of the film A 9
Train Near Magdeburg." 10

The motion was _____ agreed to.

SYNOPSIS 11

Ohio History Connection 12

Sections 297.10 and 297.20 13

Legislative Service Commission



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Increases GRF ALI 306400, Holocaust and Genocide Memorial	14
and Education Commission, by \$150,000 in FY 2026 and earmarks	15
the increase for the Augusta Chiwy Foundation and the production	16
of their film A Train Near Magdeburg.	17