

Greater Columbus Film Commission Testimony

Chairman Cirino, Ranking Member Hicks- Hudson, and distinguished members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is John Daugherty, and I am here on behalf of the Greater Columbus Film Commission.

I am here today to provide testimony on House Bill 96, the proposed budget bill for the upcoming fiscal year. This bill represents a critical blueprint for our state's future, allocating resources that will directly impact the lives of all Ohioans.

I. Overview Support for HB 96

The Columbus Film Commission strongly advocates for the inclusion of an increased film and television production tax credit within House Bill 96. This is not merely an expenditure; it is a strategic investment that yields substantial economic returns for our state and its citizens.

- **Fiscal Responsibility: A Jobs Program with Clear ROI** The Ohio Motion Picture Tax Credit is fundamentally a jobs program—this is about local, high-paying, sustainable careers for Ohioans. This industry is not about "Hollywood"; it's about creating real employment opportunities for local crew members, small businesses, drivers, caterers, carpenters, costume designers, and more, right here in Ohio. Every production that comes to our state injects large-scale capital into local economies within weeks, providing immediate and broad economic stimulus. The return on investment is clear: productions spend tens of millions of dollars directly in our communities—hiring local workers, booking hotels, eating in restaurants, and renting equipment from Ohio companies. These productions generate new tax revenues through direct spending on local goods and services, crew wages, and ancillary businesses, often exceeding the cost of the credit itself. A competitive tax credit ensures a positive return on investment by attracting high-paying jobs and stimulating local economies, ensuring that production dollars, and the jobs they create, stay within Ohio.
- **Impact on Citizens and Key Sectors: Workforce Retention, Small Business Support, and Emerging Digital Media Hub** The film and television industry is a powerful job creator, employing a diverse workforce that includes members of unions such as IATSE (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees), DGA (Directors Guild of America), PGA (Producers Guild of America), Teamsters, and SAG-AFTRA (Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists). These are often well-paying jobs that support families and local communities. Beyond direct employment, productions spend millions in the local economy on hotels, restaurants, equipment rentals, transportation, and post-production services, benefiting small businesses across various sectors. Nearly 80% of businesses hired by productions are small, local vendors, supporting dry cleaners, caterers, rental houses, graphic designers, and more. Furthermore, Ohio has over 20 colleges and universities with programs in film, animation, game development, and media production. Without meaningful in-state job

opportunities, those highly skilled students leave our state. Raising the credit helps us create the volume of work necessary to retain this creative workforce, ensuring that Ohio students can build their careers right here in Ohio. **Columbus is also emerging as a significant hub for animation and digital media.** The city's animation sector is gaining momentum with projects like *Gabriel and the Guardians*, an anime-inspired series developed by local creator Jason Moody. The team behind *Brave Wilderness*, known for their wildlife adventure content, is expanding into animation, further showcasing Columbus's creative talent. The animated feature *Sneaks*, directed by Rob Edwards and produced in Columbus, marks a significant milestone as one of the state's first major animated films, highlighting the city's growing capabilities in animation production. Educational institutions like the Columbus College of Art & Design (CCAD) and The Ohio State University (OSU) offer robust animation programs, providing students with cutting-edge training in 2D, 3D, and experimental animation techniques, further solidifying our state's position in this growing sector.

- **Specific Programs/Allocations: Meeting Current Demand** We urge the Committee to specifically consider an increase to the existing film and television production tax credit. The current \$75 million cap is exhausted within days of its availability. This means we are actively leaving money and jobs on the table. We are losing out on productions that want to film here but cannot access the necessary incentives. Raising the cap to \$100 million simply allows us to meet current demand and capitalize on the industry's strategic shift out of California. Productions are actively relocating to states that offer competitive incentives, and Ohio is on the radar—but only if we remain competitive. An enhanced credit would position Ohio as a prime destination for major studios and independent filmmakers, leading to a significant uptick in production activity.
- **Long-Term Implications: Film-Driven Tourism and Ohio Brand Building** A sustained and competitive film tax credit fosters a vibrant local film ecosystem. It encourages the growth of local talent, infrastructure, and support services, creating a self-sustaining industry that continues to generate economic activity for years to come. Film production doesn't just create short-term jobs—it creates lasting economic impact through tourism. A prime example is *The Shawshank Redemption*, filmed in Mansfield, Ohio. Dan Smith, the Executive Director of the Historic Penitentiary, who has provided written testimony, can attest that decades after its release, fans still travel to visit the Ohio State Reformatory and other filming locations, generating millions in tourism revenue for the region. Ohio has the unique opportunity to leverage its locations as both economic development zones and cultural landmarks. Every film shot here becomes part of the state's identity—driving tourism, hotel stays, local spending, and civic pride long after the production wraps. Hosting film and television projects promotes tourism and enhances Ohio's national and international visibility, building the Ohio brand. A larger cap encourages production companies to return year after year, building consistent job pipelines and incentivizing long-term investment in Ohio-based infrastructure.

II. Supporting Evidence and Data

My statements are supported by economic impact studies from other states with successful film incentive programs, as well as data from the Greater Columbus Film Commission's own tracking of production inquiries and lost opportunities due to uncompetitive incentives. For instance, as of Monday, June 2, 2025, according to Reel Scout, the industry standard database for crew, location, and vendor lists, there are 414 film crew listed in the Central Ohio region. This includes 42 members of IATSE, 13 SAG-AFTRA members, 10 DGA members, and 3 Teamsters, demonstrating a robust local talent pool ready for more work. We can provide detailed reports on job creation figures, local business spending, and comparisons with other states' incentive programs upon request.

III. Recommendations and Proposed Amendments

Increase the Film and Television Production Tax Credit Cap: We propose an amendment to House Bill 96 to increase the state's film and television production tax credit cap from its current \$75 million to \$100 million annually. This increase should be accompanied by clear, accessible guidelines for application and disbursement.

Conclusion

House Bill 96 is a profound statement of our state's priorities. I urge the Committee to carefully consider the potential impacts of this budget on all citizens and to ensure that our fiscal decisions reflect a commitment to both immediate needs and long-term prosperity. Investing in our film tax credit is an investment in jobs, local businesses, and the cultural vibrancy of Ohio.

Thank you again for your time and attention to this vital matter. I am available to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,
John Daugherty
Director, Film Columbus