



*Testimony Before Senate Finance Committee  
RE: Senate Sub-Bill of House Bill 96*

June 6, 2025

Chairman Cirino, Vice-Chairman Chavez, and Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, thank you for the opportunity to provide Interested Party Testimony on the Sub-Bill of House Bill 96 that this committee adopted earlier this week. My name is Megan Wood and I serve as the Executive Director and CEO of the Ohio History Connection. I would like to discuss with you two important line items that directly impact our historic site system in Ohio.

The Ohio Revised Code, charges us to maintain and preserve the State of Ohio's historic site system. Currently, there are 58 sites that we manage on behalf of the State of Ohio that is made up of State Historical Sites officially created by acts of the General Assembly, signed into law by the Governor. The state has accumulated this network since 1891 when Fort Ancient became the first State Historical site. ALI 360502 is the line item that provides the money to care for these sites and to keep them open to the public. This is a really big task. As a not-for-profit organization we are only able to do so with the funds provided biannually by the General Assembly in this line item. It is of critical importance. Candidly, this line item has not been adequately funded for many, many years at a level equal to the scope of Ohio's historic site system- over fifty sites, over 4,400 acres, over 300 buildings.

The Governor proposed an increase to \$11.72 million in FY 26 and FY 27. This level would get us a good deal closer to the true funding level needed to make these sites flourish in so many Ohio communities. However, the House proposed \$8.25 million in FY 26 and FY 27 and the Sub-Bill adopted earlier this week also maintains that funding level of \$8.25 million in FY 26 and FY 27. We are respectfully requesting that the Senate support the Governor's proposed funding level of \$11.72 million in each fiscal year. Amendment SC2975 has been drafted and will restore that line item to the Governor's proposed version of the budget.

The other line item (ALI 360402) I'd like to talk over with you today is the line item to capitalize on Ohio's new UNESCO World Heritage Sites designation, called inscription. In September 2023, the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks were added to the list of World Heritage Sites, making it the first in Ohio and only the 25th (at the time) in the United States. Since their inscription, we have seen major increases in visitation to the two Newark locations, the Octagon—again now open to the public—and the Great Circle and to Fort Ancient in Warren County. Since World Heritage inscription, in fact, we have seen nearly four times the attendance at these sites, including the five sites that are part of the Hopewell Culture National Historical Park in Chillicothe that is managed by the National Park Service.

The Governor and the House are proposing \$3.2 million in FY 26 and \$2.6 million in FY 27 which, in addition to recently received Capital Funding, would allow us to continue to build up these sites making them into beacons for international visitation. The Sub-Bill adopted earlier this week would move funding levels to \$2 million in FY 26 and \$2.5 million in FY 27. We are seeking support for an amendment to restore the levels for this line item to that of what was proposed by the Governor and Passed by the House.

Lots of people are going to want to see and experience these sites now and with adequate maintenance and staffing so we can demonstrate to Ohioans, Americans, and the world that globally significant history, history that extends thousands of years, is right here around us and we intend to preserve, share, and educate about that history for generations to come. Ohio has been the heart of it all for two thousand years.

The funding for our site system, as well as the UNESCO World Heritage line item, is investment in our Ohio communities, support Ohio jobs, saving Ohio history, and bring tourism dollars to Ohio communities.

Chairman Cirino and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to highlight these two very important issues. I welcome any questions you may have.