



Celebrating 250 Years of American Independence

**Ohio Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee
Hon. Susan Manchester, Chair
Testimony from Todd Kleismit, America 250-Ohio Executive Director
June 11, 2025**

Chairwoman Manchester, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Weinstein and members of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee:

On behalf of our 29-member Commission, thank you for the opportunity to share with you today about what America 250-Ohio is doing to make the most of this once-in-a-generation opportunity we have before us to showcase what Ohio and Ohioans have contributed to this great nation for 250-plus years. My name is Todd Kleismit and I have the high honor of serving as the executive director of what we call the America 250-Ohio Commission, legally known in the Ohio Revised Code (Sect. 149.309) as the Ohio Commission for the U.S. Semiquincentennial.

I want to start by thanking Senators George Lang and Hearcel Craig who have both served on the Commission for sponsoring Senate Concurrent Resolution 10. As you may know, the House last month passed House Concurrent Resolution 6, the companion to this resolution, unanimously. We thank the Ohio General Assembly for supporting our state operating budget in the amount of \$7.5 million for FY 26 and \$2 million for FY 27 in the most recent version of Am. Sub. HB 96.

We are just 204 days from January 1, 2026 and this landmark anniversary. We are working hard to ensure Ohio takes full advantage of this national anniversary in 2026 – and then we sunset in June of 2027. We launched the Commission in 2022 and we are pleased to report that we have successfully engaged many thousands of Ohioans in the nation's 250th. All 88 counties have passed resolutions expressing their intent to participate in the 250th and are forming local committees. The General Assembly charged us with engaging all 88 counties and that is well underway. We recently closed out a third round of grants in support of funding local America 250-Ohio-related projects -- \$1 million in grants in FY 24 and more than \$275,000 in grants in FY 25.

Some of what we are emphasizing relates directly to the Revolutionary War era while many more programs are focused on showcasing what Ohio and Ohioans have contributed to America. I will highlight a few of each.

Recognizing Revolutionary War veterans buried in Ohio More than 7,000 Revolutionary War veterans are buried in Ohio. We are building on the work already done by the Sons and the Daughters of the American Revolution (SAR and DAR) to fill in some of the gaps, especially trying to identify burial locations. Our aim is to better tell the stories associated with these early

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Ohioans and to create a searchable, digital map for future Ohioans to know and locate these honored veterans. No such resource currently exists. You might be surprised to learn that some of these patriots include women, African Americans and Native Americans.

Heritage Tree Plantings Borrowing from the idea of the famous Liberty Tree in Boston, the Commission is collaborating with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Ohio arboretums and organizations like Keep Ohio Beautiful to conduct a ceremonial Oak tree planting in each Ohio county. In fact, we just launched this initiative recently in Lima and other communities. An old proverb says: "The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago. The second best time is now."

Ohio Goes to the Movies Ohio's reach to movies, documentaries and films of all sorts is massive, but few people know about it. That will all change in 2026 with the introduction of "Ohio Goes to the Movies," a 250-day long film series in all 88 counties. We are partnering with hundreds of venues across the state to help ensure that local theatres, opera houses, drive-in theaters – venues of all sorts – will feature films with Ohio ties. Films such as Silence of the Lambs, The Shawshank Redemption, Major League, A Christmas Story and the soon-to-be-released Superman movie were all filmed in Ohio. Ohio actors, directors and behind-the-scenes talent can be seen in countless films if you know to look for them. Clark Gable, Dean Martin, Paul Newman, Halle Berry, Beverly D'Angelo, Dorothy Dandridge and so many others... all native Ohioans. Find out more at ohiogoes to the movies.org and check out the movie trailer now playing in theaters featuring Beverly D'Angelo and the DeWines.

Trails & Tales The Commission is working with Ohio's tourism professionals to package together a total of six different driving trails across Ohio that highlight important Ohio tourism assets like our first two that have already launched: Air & Space (launched in May 2024) and Creativity, which we launched in February in Toledo. These trails explore the places in Ohio that have made significant contributions to the nation. Our new Creativity Trail includes more than 100 places that demonstrate what Ohio has contributed to the nation's collective creative genius in six different categories. Four more trails are being planned this year and next: Ohio Waterways, Innovation, Transportation and Leadership.

Next year we will have 12 Monthly Themes:

January: Ohio Firsts & Originals
February: Ohio Works: Innovation & Industry
March: Music, Entertainment & Movies
April: Transportation
May: Arts, Culture & Literature
June: Get Outside – Natural Resources
July: Homecomings & Picnics
August: Ohio State Fair, County Fairs & Festivals
September: Sports & Fitness
October: Food & Agriculture
November: Salute to Veterans & First Responders
December: Future Ohio

I will briefly touch on just a few of the numerous other initiatives we're pursuing with the help of

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lots of partners:

- Our 4th Grade History Pass allows museums statewide (more than 60 so far) to opt-in to allow 4th graders free admission with a paid adult.
- Murals Across Ohio is a close collaboration with the Ohio Arts Council to celebrate local public art murals with America 250-Ohio branding and a dedicated webpage with a map to highlight the artists and their already completed works.
- Our Next Generation Citizens is our umbrella term encapsulating several educational initiatives that include service-learning projects, the use of iCivics and providing teacher resources.
- We have been working closely with numerous communities located along U.S. Route 250 to theme the work of America 250-Ohio with those communities and the interesting stories and histories that are key to those nine Ohio counties. We've even painted a barn along U.S. Route 250 in Wayne County.

We thank you and Governor DeWine for your continued support of this work. When we have activities happening in your districts, you can expect to hear from us and/or our local partners.

Thank you for your consideration of SCR 10 and expressing your support of the Commission's work all across Ohio. It is an honor to be with you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you have of me.

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