



**Testimony of
Rebecca Brown Asmo
Executive Director
Ohio Humanities**

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Chairwoman Roegner, Vice Chair Timken, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Higher Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today for a proposed increase to the State Historical Grants line item to fund a grant program to support organizations that explore Ohio and America's history and heritage, with priority given to organizations serving rural and underserved geographic regions of the state. Our request is for \$2M per fiscal year.

My name is Rebecca Asmo. I am the Executive Director of Ohio Humanities, a non-profit organization and Ohio's state-based partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). We distribute federal funds to organizations across the state so that everyday Ohioans have access to low and no cost public humanities programming. This model was established over 50 years ago to ensure federal funds from the NEH would reach local communities, not just large institutions.

As Ohio's state-based partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), we are a non-profit organization that distributes federal funding and provides other capacity-building support to ensure that everyday Ohioans have access to low and no cost public humanities programming. We are not a federal agency, and we are not an agency of the state government. Over 50 years ago, this was the model set up to ensure federal funds from the NEH would be distributed to local communities in each of the fifty states—not just to large institutions. Each year we award grants from the federal government to qualifying organizations throughout Ohio.

The humanities are the academic disciplines that study the human condition. In plain English, they are our history, our heritage, and the chronicling of what we do today so that future generations can learn from our experiences. In practice, the humanities come to life in the restoration of a WWII bomber for public display, the collection of oral histories of Holocaust survivors, a documentary film about Ohio's unique role in the Civil

Rights Movement, and historic preservation projects that bring context and economic development to Main Streets across the state.

Our friends at the Ohio History Connection operate one of the most robust state historical societies in the country. However, the History Connection's operating dollars only support the sites they own and operate, their vast collections, and the State Archives. Likewise, Ohio is blessed with reliable funding for the arts through the Ohio Arts Council, which does an excellent job reaching every corner of the state.

The challenge is that every other museum or organization whose mission is not arts-related or is not owned by the History Connection does not have access to these funds. For these organizations, the federal funds we distribute are their only statewide source of grant funding, and these funds do not go very far: Ohio ranks 49th in per capita funding of the public humanities.

Today, there are 453 local history organizations that are not currently served by the Ohio Arts Council, the Ohio History Connection, or Ohio Humanities. These organizations have paid staff, serve as community hubs, and are often one of the only organizations dedicated to preserving and sharing the history of their local community or constituency—yet there is no sustained, state source of funding to amplify their important work. Ohio is one of only 10 states that does not fund its state humanities council.

Since 2020, Ohio Humanities has granted more than \$5M to local communities. During the same period, we have had to turn down \$9M in requests—meaning many worthwhile projects and organizations go un- or underfunded.

More troubling, because our grants originate from federal dollars, they are highly restricted, which is less useful in small and rural communities that lack significant philanthropic infrastructure. In a typical grant cycle, 70% of the applications come from organizations in the 3C metro areas. When we have had opportunities to distribute unrestricted funds, this percentage flips, and 70% of applications come from communities outside of the 3C metro areas, demonstrating a significant need for less restricted funds in these communities.

It is with this background we are requesting an appropriation of \$2 million per fiscal year to be used to provide operating grants to humanities organizations, with priority given to underserved and rural regions. 100% of the funding will be passed through to organizations who do not currently have access to statewide cultural funding.

This program will be a catalyst for growth. For every \$1 Ohio Humanities currently invests in a project, our grantee organizations report that they are able to leverage another \$3 from private sources.

With our current resources, we are accomplishing great things. But every day we lose stories and opportunities for civic pride. For centuries, Ohio has been at the center of the world's most significant events, yet too many of us don't know these stories. We can change this, together—but only if we invest in the organizations that amplify the extraordinary stories that define Ohio's history, culture, and people.

Thank you, and I would be glad to answer any questions at this time.

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