



Broadcast Educational Media Commission

Broadcast Educational Media Commission FY 2026-2027 Budget

Testimony before the Senate Higher Education Committee

Presented by Geoffrey A. Phillips, Executive Director

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Timken, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today regarding the FY 2026-2027 operating budget for the Broadcast Educational Media Commission.

My name is Geoffrey A. Phillips and it is my privilege to serve the citizens of Ohio as the Executive Director of the Broadcast Educational Media Commission.

Broadcast Educational Media Commission – known in state government by the acronym BEMC – serves an important role in **connectivity**.

There are three partners allowing Ohioans to connect with state government activities:

- **Ohio Government Telecommunications, also known as The Ohio Channel**, along with **The Statehouse News Bureau**
- **BEMC**
- **Ohio Public Broadcasters**

Inside the Statehouse, there is familiarity with Dr. Dan Shellenbarger, and **The Ohio Channel** team, as well as Karen Kasler and The **Statehouse News Bureau** team.

To Ohioans, there is familiarity with **Ohio Public Broadcasting Partners** – a Public TV station like WPTD in Dayton and Ideastream Public Media in Cleveland, a Public Radio Station like WGTE in Toledo or WCBE in Columbus, or Radio Reading Services affiliates like VOICEcorps in Columbus or WEYE Seeing Eye Radio in Akron. Broadcasting across Ohio, they include 8 Public TV stations, 15 Public Radio Stations, and 6 Radio Reading Services.

Connecting The Ohio Channel and the Ohio Public Broadcasting Partners is BEMC. As an independent state agency, BEMC is the state funding source to each of these entities, provides access to the fiber connections across Ohio that connects the system, and serves to support the Ohio Public TV stations as a Joint Master Control.

Dr. Shellenbarger, Karen Kasler, and their teams have the expertise to tell Ohioans the state government story, while the Ohio Public Broadcasters have the experience and expertise to share the messages and other educational content with Ohioans. BEMC's expertise lies in linking them together.

These three have answered the call to share important and government news with Ohioans – always finding a way to say yes. To continue the level of transparency in government and learning opportunities to which Ohioans have grown accustomed, these entities need funds to continue to say yes to broadcasting requests.

We like to explain the interconnected relationship between BEMC, The Ohio Channel and The Statehouse News Bureau, and The Ohio Public Broadcasters as a three-legged stool. If any one leg is short, the stool falls over. BEMC appreciates the governor's recommendation for our FY 2026-2027 funding request. We look forward to any questions the committee has to support all three legs of our broadcasting system.

Chair and Committee Members, I respectfully yield our remaining time to Anthony Padgett, General Manager, WOSU Public Media, and Dr. Dan Shellenbarger, General Manager, Ohio Public Media Services. My written comments provide the committee with additional insights about the three interdependent members of this unique Broadcast platform.

I will be available for questions after Dr. Shellenbarger's presentation.

Insights about BEMC

Public Educational Television came to Ohio in 1954 and, because of a 1960 legislative study, the Ohio Educational Television Network Commission became a state entity in 1961. Over the past 65 years, the agency has had five unique names and yet one constant – public educational broadcasting.

Broadcast Educational Media Commission, our name since 2013, seeks to expand the knowledge of Ohio's citizens through promotion of educational broadcasting products, funding of the state's broadcast affiliates and organizations, and collaboration with stakeholders and advocates for technology-driven education.

BEMC has:

- A Commission of 11 members and a staff of 21
- A 24-hour / 7 days a week / 365 days a year operation
- Memorandums of Understanding to support Ohio's 8 public TV stations, 15 public radio stations, and 6 radio reading services
- Connection capability to link Ohio K-20 classrooms through live learning and content
- Collaborations with the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce and the Ohio Public TV stations to create a series of education-based multimedia videos in support of interactive learning
- A Joint Master Control (JMC) operation for Ohio's public television stations making BEMC one of the most technologically advanced public operations in the US
- Partnerships with many educational initiatives including the Ohio Open Educational Resources Collaborative with INFOhio and being a leader in the Ohio Distance Learning Association

Building on the investments of a statewide fiber connectivity system, known as the Ohio Academic Resources Network (or OARnet), BEMC *connects* the fiber network with Ohio Public TV stations in a Public TV network built out under a role given from the Ohio legislature in 1960. This foundation was expanded to include Ohio Public Radio stations to reach virtually every Ohioan, along with adding Ohio Radio Reading Services for people who are blind or low vision: all linked and *connected* under what today is BEMC.

What does this interdependent network allow the three branches of State government to do?

- **Ohio Supreme Court** – Sessions are broadcast on The Ohio Channel via the Public Television stations.
- **Ohio Legislature** – Committees and the Controlling Board sessions are broadcast on The Ohio Channel and Ohio Public Television Stations.
- **Secretary of State** – Sessions of the Ohio Ballot Board sessions are broadcast on The Ohio Channel.
- **Governor**– Messages from the Governor are broadcast on the Ohio Channel. BEMC stands ready to broadcast the Governor’s messages at a moment’s notice.
- **Ohio’s State Board of Education** – Meetings are available to Ohioans via live streaming from the Ohio Channel website.
- **Seasonal Statehouse Events** – Ohioans can hear the holiday musical presentations via livestream. In addition, several events annually held in the Atrium are available via livestream. This is an option for Ohioans who cannot attend Atrium events.

These are just a few examples of countless returns on the prior investments.

Who are the interdependent partners in bringing these virtual broadcast and live stream events to Ohioans?

- **The Ohio Channel**, known in the state budget as Ohio Government Telecommunications, provides the prime production along with assistance from The **Statehouse News Bureau** for government news content
- **Broadcast Educational Media Commission** is the arm connecting The Ohio Channel with Ohio’s Public Broadcasters. BEMC is a team of professionals housed north of downtown in a facility that is staffed 24/7/365. In addition to fiber connections, BEMC is the primary or backup Joint Master Control for each public television in Ohio, providing master control service and monitoring around the clock.
- **Ohio’s Alliance of Public Broadcasters**, known as the broadcast team, is a combination of Ohio’s Public TV stations, Ohio’s Public Radio stations and Ohio’s Radio Reading Services – stretching across Ohio to reach almost every Ohioan in their homes, on the go, or on demand.

What we are doing at BEMC is the definition of “good government”. By utilizing the most up-to-date technologies, centralizing and modernizing operations, becoming a leader within the world of educational broadcasting, and embracing the state’s goal of IT Optimization and Innovation, BEMC is serving as great stewards of taxpayer money while building for the future.

The **FY 2026-2027 budget as presented is a strategic investment in the future of education in Ohio in both public broadcasting and remote learning.**

BEMC's budget consists of two areas: **operational and subsidy**. The *operational budget* supports the everyday functions of the organization including educational broadcasting and interactive video conferencing operations and equipment, facility expenditures, and administrative costs.

The Governor's recommendation of **\$4,324,706** in FY 2026 and **\$4,398,569** in FY 2027 will allow us to meet the FY2025 to FY 2027 cost-of-living adjustments and maintain our current operations. Our staff structure provides for ensuring our 24/7/365 operation is fully covered to provide the best level of service to Ohio's public television stations, while utilizing current equipment to ensure high-quality programming reaches all corners of the Buckeye state, day or night.

The *subsidy budget* distributes funds to public television, public radio, and radio reading services across the state. BEMC works with each station through a memorandum of understanding for those funds and distributes those funds based on an agreed to formula each year after a financial report for the previous year details how those funds were used to benefit Ohioans.

The Governor's recommendation to remain flat to FY 2025, **\$3,909,000 in both FY 2026 and FY 2027** will stretch public educational broadcasting in Ohio to simply maintain current operations. This recommendation will be a challenge to the group responsible for sending audio and video signals to the homes, vehicles, and mobile devices of Ohioans. Comments from the Ohio Alliance for Public Broadcasting detail this challenge for your consideration.

Of note in the subsidy budget are funds for **Ohio Government Telecommunications**, including *The Ohio Channel*, and The **Statehouse News Bureau**.

Ohio Government Telecommunications, *The Ohio Channel*, is the broadcast entity you are most likely familiar with. The Ohio Channel produces live House and Senate sessions and committee hearings, for all Ohioans to have open access to state government.

The Statehouse News Bureau is a non-partisan, professional news organization covering the statehouse and ensuring the citizens of Ohio are well-informed about state government. I'm sure many of you have talked with Bureau Chief Karen Kasler at some point during your statehouse tenure and understand the inherent value in having this reliable news source around Capitol Square.

The Governor's recommendation is **\$2,344,400** in both FY 2026 and FY 2027 for The Ohio Channel and **\$402,000** in both FY 2026 and FY 2027 for The Statehouse News Bureau. The recommended funding will support The Ohio Channel in maintaining system infrastructure, enhancing the quality and consistency of government coverage,

and provide for the archiving and distribution of coverage to all citizens of Ohio. For the Statehouse News Bureau, the recommended funding will support updating existing equipment and expanding the coverage and distribution of the three branches to digital platforms.

When the Broadcast Educational Media Commission and our public educational broadcasting partners embarked on the journey of modernizing our system of delivery and created one of the largest and most innovative public joint master control operations in the country it was a declaration from the State of Ohio that this investment in educational broadcasting was vital to the citizens of the state.

The future of education is in media, multimedia, and online platforms – technology – and BEMC is positioned as a leader in educational broadcasting technology. With this budget we can continue this innovative path, become a model for educational broadcasting in the country, and expand our educational opportunities for all Ohioans.

In conclusion, educational technology, including educational broadcasting and distance learning, is the future. Technology is not a replacement for traditional education, but a supplement. Whether that is NOVA, Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood, Downton Abbey, Antiques Roadshow or a locally produced show on Ohio's public television stations, reading aloud from local newspapers to thousands of people who are blind or low vision, a series of videos created to help parents understand an individualized education program (IEP) or the state's focus on literacy shared in an online platform, a teacher in Columbus teaching American Sign Language to a group of high school students in rural Ohio through interactive video conferencing, this is the future of education.

The Broadcast Educational Media Commission will continue to be one of many leading the way as the State of Ohio modernizes and energizes the future of education for all students and for all Ohioans.

Thank you again, Chair Roegner, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee for reading these thoughts.



Broadcast Educational Media Commission

FY26-27 Budget

	FY25 GRF Appropriation	FY26 GRF Proposal	FY26 GRF Am. HB 96	FY27 GRF Proposal	FY27 GRF Am. HB 96	
BEMC Operations ALI 953430	\$ 4,108,000	\$ 4,324,706	\$ 4,324,706	\$ 4,398,569	\$ 4,398,569	Increase covers COLA for the three-year wage increase package
Statehouse News Bureau ALI 935401	\$ 383,000	\$ 402,000 <i>4.99% increase over budget cap for \$19,000</i>	\$ 402,000	\$ 402,000 <i>4.99% increase over budget cap for \$19,000</i>	\$ 402,000	Increase will support updating existing equipment and expanding the coverage and distribution of the three branches to digital platforms.
Ohio Gov't Telecom. ALI 935402 (The Ohio Channel)	\$ 2,233,000	\$ 2,344,400 <i>4.99% increase over budget cap for \$111,400</i>	\$ 2,344,400	\$ 2,344,400 <i>4.99% increase over budget cap for \$111,400</i>	\$ 2,344,400	Increase will support maintaining system infrastructure, enhance the quality and consistency of government coverage, and provide for the archiving and distribution of coverage to all citizens of Ohio.
Content Development, Acquisition, and Distribution ALI 935410 (Ohio Public TV/Radio/Radio Reading)	\$ 3,909,000	\$ 4,104,000 <i>4.99% increase over budget cap for \$195,000 TV - \$99,165 Radio - \$33,055 RRS - \$14,620 MM - \$48,160</i>	\$ 3,909,000	\$ 4,104,000 <i>4.99% increase over budget cap for \$195,000 TV - \$99,165 Radio - \$33,055 RRS - \$14,620 MM - \$48,160</i>	\$ 3,909,000	Sustaining the current level of support will supplement local educational services, statewide collaborations and operational costs for program acquisitions and distribution.
Overall Total	\$ 10,633,000	\$ 11,175,106 <i>3.00% increase over budget cap for \$325,500</i>	\$ 10,980,106	\$ 11,248,969 <i>2.98% increase over budget cap for \$325,500</i>	\$ 11,053,969	