



Celebrating 250 Years of American Independence

**Ohio Senate Higher Education Committee
Hon. Kristina Roegner, Chairwoman
Testimony from Todd Kleismit, America 250-Ohio Executive Director
April 29, 2025**

Chairwoman Roegner, Vice Chair Timken and Ranking Member Ingram:

On behalf of our 30-member Commission, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to you today about a 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.

As you know, our Commission is one line item among the line items listed in the Ohio History Connection budget for convenience and efficiency of operations and support. But we were constituted by the General Assembly as a stand-alone independent Commission with specific, time-sensitive duties. The Ohio History Connection serves as both the fiscal agent and a crucial partner in the work of the Commission leading up to next year's landmark 250th anniversary of the United States of America.

Please note that our Commission is temporary. We are just 246 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 helped engage 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. Now in these next two years we must escalate that engagement all throughout the calendar year of 2026 – and you can help us by ensuring we have the resources to do so.

We are excited to fully embrace the nation's 250th and I am confident you and your constituents will, too! The 2024 annual report in front of you should be helpful in sharing the scope and breadth of the programming and partnerships underway. 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 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.

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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 last week in Lima and other communities. Ohio has long had the most Tree City USA communities and there is strong interest to plant trees these next two years and some of the trees are already in the ground – the first tree plantings began last week. 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, Hal Holbrook, Paul Newman, Halle Berry, Beverly D’Angelo, Dorothy Dandridge and so many others... all native Ohioans. You can take a deep dive into all of this with the [Ohio Movies Database](#) in front of you today. “Ohio Goes to the Movies” is gaining national attention and has been endorsed by the Motion Picture Association of America and others. Find out more at [ohiogoes to the movies.org](#) and check out the movie trailer now playing in theaters featuring Beverly D’Angelo and Gov. DeWine. We’re confident this will be a game-changer putting Ohio at (or at least near) the center of Hollywood and filmmaking moving forward.

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. The Wright Brothers, NASA facilities, The Armstrong Air & Space Museum in Wapakoneta, the John and Annie Glenn Home in New Concord, the National Aviation Hall of Fame and the list goes on. 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
September:	Sports & Recreation
October:	Food & Agriculture
November:	Salute to Veterans & First Responders
December:	Future Ohio

In the interest of time, I will briefly touch on some of the numerous other initiatives we’re pursuing with the help of lots of partners:

- Our 4th Grade History Pass allows museums statewide (more than 40 so far) to opt-in to allow 4th

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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're proud to support America's River Roots Festival that will take place along the Ohio River in Cincinnati October 8-12 of this year that will celebrate the significance of the Ohio River through riverboat experiences, food, music and culture. You likely saw that the House added \$250,000 to our line item in support of River Roots.
- 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 also been proud to work with the stakeholders that have worked for years to create the Ohio Women's Suffrage Monument happen – to be unveiled right here on the Statehouse grounds in 2026.

A big part of our charge is to ensure we engage all 88 counties, and we are doing just that. I mentioned before that we are proud to report that all 88 counties have passed resolutions to participate in the nation's 250th anniversary next year. We also have similar resolutions from well over 100 additional local governments – cities, villages, townships and a few local school districts, too. In FY 2024, we provided grants using state funds totaling \$1 million to help jump start some early activations and get America 250 on people's minds ahead of time. We awarded 84 grants spread out to more than 50 counties. We recently awarded our final round of grants from FY 25 dollars to support the work of the committees from those America 250-Ohio designated communities.

Ohio is among the national leaders in embracing fully the opportunities we have before us to make the absolute most of the nation's 250th anniversary next year. This is such an important moment for Ohio to showcase what Ohio and Ohioans have contributed to the United States of America these past 250+ years. We have enjoyed working with many of you in the General Assembly, with Governor DeWine and with countless groups all over the state. We also have strong support from the private sector as our philanthropic partners such as Cenovus Energy, T. Marzetti, Grange Insurance and others will attest.

We thank Governor DeWine and the Ohio General Assembly for the proposed \$7.75 million for FY 26 and \$2.5 million for FY 2027 for the Commission, which reflects the Commission's budget needs to achieve the statewide programming and described here today. Let me remind you that July 4, 2026 – the nation's actual birthday – happens in FY 2027. We will still have plenty of activities and events happening all through the second year of this biennium. We cannot emphasize enough how important it will be to have the full support of the General Assembly in FY 26 as that is a huge year for all of us to execute and carry out all of our ambitious plans for the landmark anniversary.

I can tell you from traveling the state and engaging with so many people in every county that Ohio is ready for this opportunity. Ohioans are truly thirsty for opportunities to come together, to be unified, behind an effort just like this. Imagine 2026 as a unique time when communities and organizations host dozens of events and engage schools and children in educational activities. County courthouses are flying their America 250-Ohio flags. "Ohio Goes to the Movies" films are shown in all 88 counties.

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Cemetery events recognizing Revolutionary War veterans can be found most weekends. A 250 Buckeye Train carries hundreds of people from one part of the state to another. Even some of your state legislative colleagues may drive by America 250-Ohio barn paintings or murals in small towns on their drive to the Statehouse. And, we hope, an America 250-Ohio butter sculpture at the 2026 Ohio State Fair! Let's make sure to create some lasting memories for this next generation of Ohioans to engage with Ohio and its history in 2026. We consider our work part of our state's efforts to keep Ohioans rooted here and to remind them what an amazing place this is to grow up, raise a family and find the right career for them.

We believe that our teamwork has prepared the runway for a successful celebration next year. I am certain there will be several initiatives that will sustain themselves beyond the life of our Commission. We appreciate your partnership in this most important endeavor. We will not be back here next biennium. America 250-Ohio Commission sunsets no later than June 30, 2027. Our time is now, most importantly in FY 2026. Thank you for your continued support not only for the work of the 250 Commission, but all of the Ohio History Connection budget in this critically important biennium budget. I would be happy to answer any questions you have of me. Thank you. It is an honor to be with you today.

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