

## Ohio Senate Higher Education Committee

### Testimony from Dan Shellenbarger, General Manager of Ohio Public Media Services

#### April 29, 2025

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Timken, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee,

I am Dan Shellenbarger, General Manager of Ohio Public Media Services, overseeing the operations of The Ohio Channel and the Statehouse News Bureau. I am speaking to you on behalf of The Ohio Channel, the Statehouse News Bureau, and the rest of public media. Thank you for this opportunity to talk with you. I am here to affirm the vital role of public media in Ohio and outline why continued investment in us is essential.

I'm here to support the budget as submitted to you by my colleagues at the Broadcast Educational Media Commission. State funding for OGT is included in the overall BEMC budget.

I helped to create Ohio Government Telecommunications in 1996 to provide objective, unbiased, and accurate representation of Ohio's government activities.

While many of you may be familiar with our live coverage of legislative meetings, our services extend far beyond that. We collaborate with caucus staff to produce PSAs and greetings, cover and distribute press conferences, and produce training materials and multimedia content for government use, as well as produce hundreds of hours of Ohio-proud programming.

Our organization is unique in that we serve **all three branches** of government in various capacities. The legislature's investment in OGT's infrastructure allows us to centralize media services, which saves money for all state agencies as well as the Supreme Court of Ohio.

Beyond covering official proceedings and providing technical services, OGT staff also produce educational programming that showcases Ohio's history, arts, and culture. We package this content with our government coverage, **as well as PBS affiliate programming**, and make it available for free to all Ohioans through our website and through Ohio's PBS stations.

During the last General Assembly, we covered 3,019 hours of government meetings. We expect that number to continue climbing in this General Assembly. Indeed, you have been busy this GA. We have already recorded 753 hours of coverage in just four months! That is almost a third of what we covered over the previous two years.

When I was working to create The Ohio Channel in 1996, we looked for broadcast partners to distribute our coverage of the legislature. Traditional commercial outlets could not carry us because of their time constraints. The cable industry was also unable to provide the bandwidth for coverage. We distributed our coverage for many years by mailing VHS tapes to the few public access channels that agreed to air us for just a few hours a week. Then, public media approached us during the digital conversion. They offered to provide a channel dedicated to our coverage over the air at no additional cost to us. Because this state had the foresight to install fiber to connect all of our public media stations. We did not have to pay expensive satellite fees for our distribution. We became one of the few states with TV broadcast coverage reaching all of Ohio.

For 28 years, The Ohio Channel has covered the workings of state government. We have more than 23,000 hours of coverage. All of this is accessible online. These videos have been streamed more than 85 million times. For the past three decades, we have recorded history in real-time. We have accurate depictions of the debates that have made our laws. Accurate and honest recordings are an ever-important resource in this day and age.

The Ohio Channel connects your work to every Ohioan and provides media services to all state government. These services save taxpayer dollars for all three branches of government. But we could not have the reach we do without the millions of dollars of infrastructure and support you have invested in public media.

I want to turn to the Statehouse News Bureau for a moment. In the Museum Gallery, located in the basement of the Statehouse, are framed quotes. One of those quotes is from Thomas Worthington, Ohio's first U.S. senator and sixth governor. It says, "Without information and knowledge, the blessings of free government cannot be long continued." This is what Karen Kassler and her team in the Statehouse News Bureau work to fulfill. The Statehouse News Bureau is not driven by "clicks" driven by outrageous headlines. The Bureau has been a part of the Statehouse for 44 years. They have an intricate understanding of the complexities of government. I know she has interviewed some of you on her weekly TV show—these are not sound bites. They are in-depth discussions of issues.

The Ohio Channel and the Statehouse News Bureau are just parts of the mosaic that makes up public media. Both of these organizations work to help the people of our communities. Public media is local. Each station has rich relationships with their local community. Many of the programs you hear or watch on public television or radio are local programs. Antiques Roadshow is programmed along with Central Ohio's Bluegrass Ramble. We feature programming from the Ohio Farm Bureau, numerous local bands and artists, as well as

community talk shows, and our own The Ohio Channel. When we are not providing C-SPAN-like coverage, we showcase programs that highlight the history and culture of our great state.

Public media is much more than content. It is infrastructure—a system built over decades to meet the critical communication needs of all Ohioans. We carry state government coverage, programs showcasing our great state, educational programming, emergency notifications, and connectivity to the rest of the world. There are towers, transmitters, servers, electricity, and staff that make all of this available.

Emergency management is a vital aspect of public media. It was raining almost 50 years ago on the evening of January 25. Unexpectedly, and within a few hours, the temperatures plummeted to near zero, the rain turned into more than a foot of snow, and wind gusts exceeded 100MPH in some places around the state, causing perilous drifts that buried roads and houses. We were snowed in. Power was out, phone lines were down, and government buildings, hospitals, and stores were inaccessible. Governor Rhodes had to rely on phone calls to address our state until broadcast connections could be made. We are in a different situation now because of your investment in public media. Due to our infrastructure and public media funding, we can establish almost immediate connections with all Ohioans. We did this during the pandemic. We are aware of emergencies—tornadoes, floods, damaging winds, and other tragic incidents, such as train derailments. Our ability to reach all Ohioans in emergencies can be life-saving. We are unique in the nation due to our extensive connections throughout the state. This infrastructure is a valuable and critical resource.

Ohio has long been a leader in supporting public media. Ohio is a shining example of how we can succeed when collaborating. Ohio has realized the importance of sustaining this core infrastructure. Maintenance is cheaper than rebuilding. These funds help to ensure we stay operational now and in the future.

Today, I urge this committee to continue that commitment. Your continued investment in public media is an investment in emergency preparedness, government access, education, workforce development, and showcasing all aspects of our state's history, arts, and culture. With continued funding, we will maintain Ohio as a national model for how public media can best serve the interests of its government and the people of the state.

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

## OGT Stats

<https://ohiochannel.org/view-stats>

Program Hours	
<b>135th GA</b> 2023-2024	<b>3,019</b>
134th GA 2021-2022	2,636
133rd GA 2019-2020	2,065
132nd GA 2017-2018	821
131st GA 2015-2016	371

Website Content	
Total website videos	29,271
Total website video hours	23,280

Website Interactions	
New Users - 135th GA	482,000
Total visits since 2015	85,385,824

## OGT Services

### Facilities

OGT's Statehouse studio facility and production services are available to use, free of charge, to every statewide official and legislative public office holder.

OGT Master Control is connected by fiber optics throughout the Statehouse, Vern Riffe Center, Rhodes Tower, and the Thomas J. Moyer Ohio Judicial Center. Additionally, Master Control can be connected to fiber optic and satellite media services through BEMC, allowing for broadcast-quality live interviews with national and international media.

### The Ohio Channel on PBS

OGT, in partnership with Ohio Educational Television Stations, manages The Ohio Channel, which is distributed through digital signals from public broadcasting stations statewide through the BEMC facility. This is the only channel dedicated to Ohio government, public affairs, culture, and history.

### [OhioChannel.org](https://ohiochannel.org)

All legislative, Supreme Court, and Governor events covered by OGT are streamed live, archived and keyword-searchable. The site also features original programming produced by OGT staff including hundreds of interviews with Ohio veterans, outdoor enthusiasts, artists, and writers, providing a snapshot of the history, arts and culture of Ohio.