



**House State Government Committee
June 10, 2015
Testimony of OpenNEO
Executive Director, Beth Sebian**

Chairman Maag, Vice-Chair Kunze, Ranking Member Gerberry, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share proponent testimony of House Bill 130, also known as the DataOhio Initiative, on behalf of OpenNEO.

OpenNEO is an Ohio nonprofit organization committed to advancing open data in Northeast Ohio. I launched OpenNEO earlier this year, with my co-founder Jill Miller Zimon, to catalyze growing interest in our community around open data. We provide education about open data standards, share case studies and best practices, and organize local governments to pursue open data in a collaborative, regional fashion. Our end goal is for local governments embrace open data policy like this DataOhio legislation.

When the Ohio Constitution was adopted, our founders could not have imagined a world of Facebook and Google. Ohio's early codes of law make no mention of "data standards" or "data interoperability." The State of Ohio Constitution does envision, however, a government that is accessible and accountable to the public. Our Constitution presents a vision of a government in which public funds are spent judiciously and in proper proportion to the interests of the community, and the public is well informed and well equipped to make meaningful contributions to community governance.

To fulfill these responsibilities in the 21st Century, the public and the public officials who serve them need access to public information in a timely manner, online, and in formats that support mass aggregation, comparison, and analysis. This DataOhio legislation is an important step in updating the language of the Ohio Revised Code to address these demands of today's Information Age. We believe this DataOhio legislation will advance standardization of public data and data-driven decision making and use of resources across nonprofit, public policy, and private sectors alike.

This work is urgent and important. The public's trust in government is low. According to a recent Gallup study on confidence in state and local government, the percentage of Americans reporting a great or fair deal of trust in state government has declined from 75% in the mid-1970s to 62% in 2014. In the aftermath of the recession, these figures dropped as low as 51% in 2009 and 52% in 2010. Attitudes toward the federal government are even bleaker.

To address this lack of trust and vitality, we need to make government more accessible, and we need to continue to elevate the quality of policy and decision-making within government. Opening government data in a way that facilitates the conversion of data into information people inside and outside government can understand and make use of is essential. The DataOhio legislation is an important step in this direction.

Today, I would like to share several specific strengths of this collection of provisions from the DataOhio legislation.

First, it is appropriate that the DataOhio Initiative is an opt-in opportunity for local governments. This opt-in approach, compared to a mandate, is much more likely to build a groundswell of interest and

enthusiasm in opening data from local leaders. We will need these leaders' support to institutionalize both the information technology and culture needed to support long-term change.

Second, the \$10,000 grant "carrot" for local governments who comply with open data standards is likely to channel curiosity from local leaders toward the program. Though the initial open data standards are modest, they will lead to early wins that will spur more interest in open standards compliance.

Third, we are enthusiastic about the potential for an online data catalog managed by the State of Ohio under the State Auditor. This centralized resource can be a vehicle for disseminating data standards and providing technical support and assistance to individuals and organizations seeking to participate in open data exchange. We are especially pleased to read that the data catalog will include a forum that will allow users to share best practices. An online forum of this sort for open data practitioners can have a dramatic impact on the overall success and footprint of the DataOhio initiative.

Fourth, we are pleased to see the state librarian play a central role in the development of open data standards, management of the grants program, and development of the open data catalog. We are confident that the state librarian will be equipped to develop data standards with an eye toward the end uses of data and will therefore deliver maximum utility.

Fifth, and finally, it's appropriate for this legislation to focus especially on revenue and expenditure data as an initial target for data uniformity, through the establishment of a voluntary uniform accounting system. This is a crucial first step toward "evaluating returns on investment" as Representative Duffey described in his sponsor testimony.

Before concluding, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce some final considerations for the legislation as written. We would like the chairman and committee members to consider incorporating a date for revisiting the scope and funding of the DataOhio Initiative, beyond the annual updates tasked to the DataOhio board. I suspect the DataOhio effort will illuminate a wide array of local government needs and obstacles that the state will be well positioned to address.

Also, we want to ensure that the DataOhio Board, Auditor Yost's office, and the state library are properly funded to develop systematic responses to the needs that emerge from local partners. Further funding for the data catalog, training, and technical support could greatly enhance the initiative's impact. We wonder if the proposed allocation will allow for sufficient responsiveness and innovation.

Overall, this legislation is an important and timely first step toward institutionalizing data standards and data driven decision-making. Together, the elements of the DataOhio legislation will move us all closer to understanding what government spends and what we get for it.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and for the leadership demonstrated in this legislation. I am available to provide more comments or testimony at your request.