

Ohio Government Telecommunications FY 2022-2023 Budget Testimony
House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education
Dan Shellenbarger, Executive Director, OGT

Chairman Cross, Ranking member Howse, and members of the committee thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Dan Shellenbarger, and I serve as Executive Director of OGT/The Ohio Channel. I am here today in support of the budget submitted to you by the Broadcast Educational Media Commission and endorsed by the Alliance for Public Telecommunications. Our state support is included in the overall BEMC budget.

With all of the other names 2020 has been called, for OGT it was a banner year. January of last year marked the first time in our history where we were allowed in all committees in both the House and the Senate. We worked all through the autumn to add the 7 additional control rooms and all of the wiring and cameras that were needed to accomplish this task. The new production rooms had to be tiny. We put 10 people in a room the size of a closet to be able to cover additional events. Everything was working as planned until Covid arrived. As the state started shutting down, we started ramping up. The work of government did not stop, it could not stop. We went from barely being able to cover all committees to being requested to cover many more government meetings. All of our small rooms no longer worked for staffing. We had to improvise and hire more staff. We logged 953 hours of coverage for the General Assembly. In addition, we covered hundreds of other hours for the Supreme Court and the Executive Branch. State government turned to our infrastructure to help conduct their business. A prime example of this is the Controlling Board used us to help with the work of appropriating state funds for the continued business of government. We went from not being fully funded to adequately cover all additional committee hears to being tasked with covering even more events.

The staff of OGT/The Ohio Channel have been tireless workers. They keep finding solutions for seemingly impossible problems. There have been times where we have been streaming up to 13 simultaneous events. The thing is, we don't do this in isolation. OGT staff covers events but to get it to the people of the state it needs BEMC and the OPBS stations. It is all of us working collectively that gets the signal out.

This collective system is unlike any state in the nation. In 1996 the legislature appropriated funds to connect all of the PBS television and radio stations in the state. With this investment, we were able to provide the state a robust distribution network to reach the citizens of the state with educational programming, news, and emergency broadcast services. Never in our 25-year history has this been utilized as it was during 2020. Not only did OGT bring the business of the state before the people of the state, but the stations also helped with distance learning in the schools, the radio reading services helped Ohioans with disabilities keep up to date with the news, and the stations covered and shared important events around the state. During the start of the crisis in March, we were able to go on-air immediately to all citizens on TV, radio, and the web. It is because of the foresight of this investment we were able to do this. Any other state would need to spend millions to make this happen. Even when we are not in a pandemic, we use this system for education, public affairs, and communications. We are able to respond to

the needs of both elected officials and the citizens because of this investment and in order to keep doing this, we need continued investment.

For OGT, we request an additional \$210,426 per year to our FY 2020 funding level of \$1,708,526, to bring the funding, each year, to \$1,918,952. Before the pandemic, we were already at a staffing deficit with the request for all committee coverage. With even more requests being made, we simply cannot do everything without full funding. We do more than just legislative coverage. We work with all of your caucus staff to assist with media and equipment needs as well as perform video assistance for all of state government. We do this for free to help other agencies save money, something vitally important when there are budget cuts.

But, we are just the originator of the signal. Both BEMC and the Alliance need to be funded at their request. An appropriately funded system and strong stations are key factors in our ability to serve the state by reaching out to the citizens of Ohio. When you meet in session we are available across the state on all visual mediums: air, cable, and streaming. Our relationship with Ohio's PBS stations has allowed this. There are so many benefits to our partnership with PBS Stations and BEMC that are not quantifiable.

The PBS brand is continuously voted as America's most trusted source of public affairs information. OGT and subsequently, the state, benefits from this brand identification. We are constantly looking for cheaper ways to operate. BEMC has been instrumental in helping us program the Ohio Channel and keep us on air. We have also partnered with the Legislative Information Service to provide all of our web development and streaming. Capitol Square Board provides us our facility space and its required maintenance.

As we have been helped with our partnerships we continue to help other state agencies with their video and streaming needs. We usually do not charge for these services to them. This is another way OGT saves the state hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars.

Our reach is significant. Because of the network, we are available, in some form, in every single household across the state. All of our official coverage is immediately archived forever and readily accessible to anyone with a computer or mobile device--all text searchable.

Times are tough and so many different organizations are clamoring for so few dollars. Our system is indeed an investment. But, it has been times like now where the investment has paid off. When this is over this investment will help keep Ohio even better in the future.

Additional Ohio Government Telecommunications Information

OGT Stats

Yearly over-the-air & cable television viewers:	1.6 million
2020 total streaming views	34.5 million
Ohiochannel.org views (all time):	41 million
House video only views (all time):	4.9 million
OGT total video hours:	16,572
OGT total videos:	17,969

OGT Services

The Ohio Channel

OGT in conjunction with Ohio Public Broadcasting, OGT manages the Ohio Channel which is distributed on the available digital broadcast 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

Through its website, anyone can watch Legislative events, Supreme Court sessions, and Governor's events live. All footage is archived and is searchable. The site also features educational programming, including *Remarkable Ohio*, which tracks the more than 1,200 historical markers around the state, vast programming archives from the Ohio Channel, hundreds of interviews with Ohio veterans, outdoor enthusiasts, artists, and writers, and links to all parts of state government.

OGT Facilities

OGT is connected by fiber-optics between Capitol Square, OGT Master Control, the Riffe Center, Rhodes Tower, and the Ohio Judicial Center. Elected officials can "go live" from anywhere on the Statehouse campus and be connected to anywhere in the world. OGT also assists with member's programming, *Conversation Ohio*, which is a public affairs show produced and hosted by legislative members and distributed to cable access stations around the state.