

Ohio House Finance Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee

Testimony from Kevin E. Martin, President and CEO, ideastream
On behalf of the Ohio Alliance for Public Telecommunications
March 3, 2021

Chairman Cross, Ranking member Howse, and members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to address this important committee. My name is Kevin Martin, and I serve as the Chair of the Ohio Alliance for Public Telecommunications, the President for the Ohio Educational Television Stations, and the President and CEO of ideastream in Cleveland. The Ohio Alliance for Public Telecommunications includes the Ohio Educational Television Stations, Ohio Public Radio and Ohio Radio Reading Services.

I am expressing my support today for the budget submitted to you by the Broadcast Educational Media Commission and endorsed by the Alliance for Public Telecommunications. The state support for the Statehouse News Bureau, Ohio Government Telecommunications (OGT) and Content Development, Acquisition, and Distribution are included in the overall BEMC budget.

ideastream is a multiple media public service organization that, like other public media organizations service communities throughout the State, provides a range of educational and public services to the citizens of Ohio. Those services include multiple channel public television and radio stations which are widely appreciated and supported. In addition, public media organizations provide educational technology resources to schools and teachers, help train teachers how to improve education through technology and provide interactive video courses allowing schools to share valuable instructional resources. Public media organizations are also deeply involved in communities and act (in non-pandemic times) as community conveners encouraging citizen involvement in dialog about community issues. Collaborating together, public stations work to serve the State through the Ohio Public Radio (OPR) and Television Statehouse News Bureau and The Ohio Channel.

While the vast majority of funding for public broadcasting comes from viewers and listeners like you, the operational support and funding from the State of Ohio assures that all citizens and schools have access to the same quality programs and services.

The Broadcast Educational Media Commission (BEMC) is the State of Ohio agency with responsibility for public broadcasting and distance learning. The agency is doing a

fabulous job of providing both operational support for stations and providing important grant funding for OGT, the OPR and Television Statehouse News Bureau and Multiple Media Educational programs.

The Governor has recommended maintaining funding at a FY21, post set-aside level of the current biennium for this agency. While appreciated, this funding level leaves the Content Development, Acquisition, and Distribution items in the budget lower than FY20 levels since it absorbed the entirety of the set-side reductions.

Over this unprecedented year, Ohio's PBS stations, with signals that cover the state, rose to the challenge by providing to Ohio's families, children, and educators a full schedule of television broadcast programming ("at home learning") of PreK-12 educational content that was aligned to Ohio's academic standards. We provided the only learning content available to students at home who had either insufficient or no internet access. Ohio PBS viewership increased more than 30% for this programming. Station educational staff, leveraging our work in both technology and education, supplemented this programming by providing online and digital learning objects. But it's not just Ohio's viewers, those with severe vision loss was in critical need of our Ohio Radio Reading Services.

Perhaps the most crippling aspect of vision loss is the loss of independent access to information. Without access to current information a person living with vision loss cannot take part in community events, save money with sales flyers, read bus schedules, or stay safe during the pandemic.

The population in need is growing with baby boomers hitting retirement age – when vision loss occurs with greater and greater frequency. As of the 2010 US Census American Community Survey there were an estimated 278,745 blind residents in Ohio – roughly 2.4% of the population. Six Ohio radio reading services reach homes without internet service and is at no charge to the user. Dependent on volunteerism and community donations, these small, not-for-profit organizations must have State support to ensure core services continue and that we have an informed and educated electorate, reduce public assistance needs, and can increase employment of visually impaired persons.

In addition, stations have maintained their commitment to public safety service in creating the Ohio Emergency Alert System, supporting alerts and emergency messaging for the public, and in the future, serving first responders. Ohio remains a national leader in this field.

Noting all of this, the Commissioners of the BEMC asked staff to develop an optimal budget. The Commission approved that budget unanimously and we respectfully request that you do all you can to assure that optimal budget for Content Development, Acquisition, and Distribution is included in the 2022-2023 budget of the State of Ohio. It calls for an increase of pre set-aside levels of \$614,324, or \$1,355,705 post set-aside levels for both FY2022 and 2023.

This concludes my testimony.

Thank you for your past and continued support.