



Broadcast Educational Media Commission FY 2024-2025 Budget
*Testimony before the Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary
Education Committee*

Presented by Geoffrey A. Phillips, Executive Director

Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, thank you for the opportunity to speak today regarding the FY 2024-2025 operating budget for the Broadcast Educational Media Commission.

My name is Geoffrey A. Phillips and it is my privilege to serve the citizens of Ohio as the Executive Director of the Broadcast Educational Media Commission.

Broadcast Educational Media Commission – known in state government by the acronym BEMC – serves an important role in **connectivity**.

There are three partners allowing Ohioans to connect with state government activities:

- **Ohio Government Telecommunications, also known as The Ohio Channel**, along with **The Statehouse News Bureau**
- **BEMC**
- **Ohio Public Broadcasters**

Inside the Statehouse, there is familiarity with Dr. Dan Shellenbarger and **The Ohio Channel** team, as well as Karen Kasler and The **Statehouse News Bureau** team.

To Ohioans, there is familiarity with **Ohio Public Broadcasting Partners** – a Public TV station like CET in Cincinnati or Ideastream Public Media in Cleveland, a Public Radio Station like WGTE in Toledo or WCBE in Columbus, or Radio Reading Services affiliates like VOICEcorps in Columbus or WORDS in Dayton. Broadcasting across Ohio, they include 8 Public TV stations, 15 Public Radio Stations, and 6 Radio Reading Services.

Connecting The Ohio Channel and the Ohio Public Broadcasting Partners is BEMC. As an independent state agency, BEMC is the state funding source to each of these entities, provides access to the fiber connections across Ohio that connects the system, and serves to support the Ohio Public TV stations as a Joint Master Control.

Dr. Shellenbarger, Ms. Kasler, and their teams have the expertise to tell Ohioans the state government story, while the Ohio Public Broadcasters have the experience and expertise to share the messages and other educational content with Ohioans. BEMC's expertise lies in linking them together.

During the recent pandemic years, these three have answered the call to share important health and government news with Ohioans – always finding a way to say yes. In order to continue the level of transparency in government and learning opportunities to which Ohioans have grown accustomed, these entities need funds to continue to say yes to broadcasting requests.

We like to explain the interconnected relationship between BEMC, The Ohio Channel and The Statehouse News Bureau, and The Ohio Public Broadcasters as a three-legged stool. If any one leg is short, the stool falls over. BEMC appreciates the governor's recommendation for our FY 2024-2025 funding request. We look forward to any questions the committee has to support the remaining two legs of our broadcasting system.

In our advance materials we gave you a one-page overview of the Optimal Budget the BEMC Commissioners are requesting the House use to adjust the appropriations for The Ohio Channel, The Statehouse News Bureau, and our Public Broadcasting partners.

Chair and Committee Members, I respectfully yield our remaining time to Kitty Lensman, President and Chief Executive Officer of Public Media Connect, ThinkTV and CET and Dr. Dan Shellenbarger, Executive Director of The Ohio Channel. My written comments provide the committee with additional insights about the three interdependent members of this unique Broadcast platform.

I will be available for questions after Dr. Shellenbarger's presentation.

Insights about BEMC

Public Educational Television came to Ohio in 1954 and, as a result of a 1960 legislative study, the Ohio Educational Television Network Commission became a state entity in 1961. Over the past 62 years, the agency has had five unique names and yet one constant – public educational broadcasting.

Broadcast Educational Media Commission, our name since 2013, seeks to expand the knowledge of Ohio's citizens through promotion of educational broadcasting products, funding of the state's broadcast affiliates and organizations, and collaboration with stakeholders and advocates for technology-driven education.

BEMC has:

- A Commission of 11 members and a staff of 21
- A 24-hour / 7 days a week / 365 days a year operation
- Memorandums of Understanding to support Ohio's 8 public TV stations, 15 public radio stations, and 6 radio reading services
- Connection capability to link Ohio K-20 classrooms through live learning and content
- Collaborations with the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Public TV stations to create a series of education-based multimedia videos in support of interactive learning
- A Joint Master Control (JMC) operation for Ohio's public television stations making BEMC one of the most technologically advanced public operations in the US
- Partnerships with many educational initiatives including the Ohio Open Educational Resources Collaborative with INFOhio and being a leader in the Ohio Distance Learning Association

Building on the investments of a statewide fiber connectivity system, known as the Ohio Academic Research Network (or OARnet), BEMC *connects* the fiber network with Ohio Public TV stations in a Public TV network built out under a role given from the Ohio legislature in 1960. This foundation was expanded to include Ohio Public Radio stations to reach virtually every Ohioan, along with adding Ohio Radio Reading Services for people who are blind or low vision: all linked and *connected* under what today is BEMC.

What does this interdependent network allow the three branches of State government to do?

- **Ohio Supreme Court** – During the pandemic, was able to hear testimony virtually with Justices in separate locations and those testifying in locations across Ohio. Sessions continue to be broadcast on The Ohio Channel website and most of the Public Television stations.
- **Ohio Legislature** – While online meetings were permitted, House and Senate Committees met virtually to review the pandemic response and the State's Controlling Board broadcast live meetings with members able to stay safely in their homes around Ohio. Committees and the Controlling Board sessions remain broadcast on The Ohio Channel and Ohio Public Television Stations.
- **Secretary of State** – In preparation for the November 2020 Presidential Election, numerous election officials gathered from around Ohio via virtual connections allowing Ohioans to watch and listen. It is anticipated the same will occur for all future elections.
- **Governor & Ohio Department of Health** – Important health messages outlining the State's response to COVID-19 became at times a daily highlight for Ohioans. BEMC stands ready to broadcast Governor's messages at a moment's notice.
- **Ohio Board of Education** – Was able to continue to function via monthly virtual meetings held via live streaming. Importantly and in addition, Ohio PBS Learning at Home programming gave important education options to Ohio parents and students as schools adjusted to virtual learning. Home learning opportunities continue to be important to teachers, students, and families.
- **Seasonal Statehouse Events** – While Ohio school choirs could not share holiday singing at the Statehouse, Ohioans were able to hear the musical presentations via this broadcast alternative. In addition, several events annually held in the Atrium became first time virtual live stream events. This continues to be an option for Ohioans who cannot attend Atrium events.

These are just a few examples of countless returns on the prior investments.

Who are the interdependent partners in bringing these virtual broadcast and live stream events to Ohioans?

- **The Ohio Channel**, known in the state budget as Ohio Government Telecommunications, provides the prime *production* along with assistance from The **Statehouse News Bureau** for government news content
- **Broadcast Educational Media Commission** is the arm *connecting* The Ohio Channel with Ohio's Public Broadcasters. BEMC is a team of professionals housed north of downtown in a facility that is staffed 24/7/365. In addition to fiber connections, BEMC is the primary or backup Joint Master Control for each public television in Ohio, providing master control service and monitoring around the clock.

- **Ohio's Alliance of Public Broadcasters**, known as the *broadcast* team, is a combination of Ohio's Public TV stations, Ohio's Public Radio stations and Ohio's Radio Reading Services – stretching across Ohio to reach almost every Ohioan in their homes, on the go, or on demand.

In our advance materials we gave you a one-page overview of the Optimal Budget the BEMC Commissioners is requesting the House use to adjust the appropriations for our Public Broadcasting partners.

I call the Committee's attention to the requests:

- **The Ohio Channel** requests **\$285,000** more per Fiscal Year to hire additional staff to cover increased coverage requests at The Statehouse and state agencies
- **The Statehouse News Bureau** requests **\$78,313** to hire a new reporter following the promotion of a staff member to news editor for growing social media and website demand
- **Ohio's Public Broadcasters** request **\$371,377** per Fiscal Year to address increased operational expenses and reduced underwriting/local support. These funds will be distributed to all stations, which results in about \$1,000 per month to each on average
- **BEMC** appreciates the governor's recommendation to fully fund our request. Most of the additional monies will be spent on required salary increases, with the remainder paying for increases in utilities, equipment maintenance, and addressing our aging facility.

What we are doing at BEMC is the definition of "good government". By utilizing the most up-to-date technologies, centralizing and modernizing operations, becoming a leader within the world of educational broadcasting, and embracing the state's goal of IT Optimization and Innovation, BEMC is serving as great stewards of taxpayer money while building for the future.

The FY 2024-2025 budget as presented is a strategic investment in the future of education in Ohio in both public broadcasting and remote learning.

BEMC's budget consists of two areas: **operational and subsidy**. The *operational budget* supports the everyday functions of the organization including educational broadcasting and interactive video conferencing operations and equipment, facility expenditures, and administrative costs.

The Governor's recommendation of **\$4,107,410** in FY 2024 and FY 2025 will allow us to **maintain our current operations**. Our staff structure provides for ensuring our 24/7/365 operation is fully covered to provide the best level of service to Ohio's public television stations, while utilizing current equipment to ensure high-quality programming reaches all corners of the Buckeye state, day or night.

The subsidy budget distributes funds to public television, public radio, and radio reading services across the state. BEMC works with each station through a memorandum of understanding for those funds and distributes those funds based on an agreed to formula each year after a financial report for the previous year details how those funds were used to benefit Ohioans.

The Governor's recommendation to remain flat to FY 2023 (**\$3,909,231**) in both **FY 2024 and FY 2025** will stretch public educational broadcasting in Ohio to simply maintain current operations. This recommendation will be a challenge to the group responsible for sending audio and video signals to the homes, vehicles, and mobile devices of Ohioans. Comments from the Ohio Alliance for Public Broadcasting detail this challenge for your consideration.

Also included in the "Optimal Budget" is a request for greater support of **\$371,377 in both FY 2024 and 2025** for subsidies to Ohio's public TV, Radio and Radio Reading Services, and educational multimedia grants. Public media across the state of Ohio provides invaluable educational and local community content and this small increase will allow public media to continue operating at current levels, which includes funding to offset rising utility costs and impacts on underwriting/local support. You can read more detail about this request in the comments from the Alliance for Ohio's Public Broadcasters.

Of note in the subsidy budget are funds for **Ohio Government Telecommunications**, including *The Ohio Channel*, and The **Statehouse News Bureau**.

Ohio Government Telecommunications, *The Ohio Channel*, is the broadcast entity you are most likely familiar with. The Ohio Channel produces live House and Senate sessions and committee hearings, for all Ohioans to have open access to state government.

The Statehouse News Bureau is a non-partisan, professional news organization covering the statehouse and ensuring the citizens of Ohio are well-informed about state government. I'm sure many of you have talked with Bureau Chief Karen Kasler at some point during your statehouse tenure and understand the inherent value in having this reliable news source around Capitol Square.

Additionally, the Governor's proposal includes flat funds for both The Ohio Channel and The Statehouse News Bureau. The requested increase for The Ohio Channel **totals \$285,000 in both FY 2024 and 2025** and is necessary to improve staffing levels to meet the needs of growing the broadcasting of House and Senate committees through The Ohio Channel. The increase for the Statehouse News Bureau is a modest **\$78,313 in both FY 2024 and 2025** to allow for another reporter to report on Statehouse activities following the promotion of a staff member to digital management and marketing.

When the Broadcast Educational Media Commission and our public educational broadcasting partners embarked on the journey of modernizing our system of delivery and created one of the largest and most innovative public joint master control operations in the country it was a declaration from the State of Ohio that this investment in educational broadcasting was vital to the citizens of the state.

The future of education is in media, multimedia, and online platforms – technology – and BEMC is positioned as a leader in educational broadcasting technology. With this budget we can continue this innovative path, become a model for educational broadcasting in the country, and expand our educational opportunities of all Ohioans.

In conclusion, educational technology, including educational broadcasting and distance learning, is the future. Technology is not a replacement for traditional education, but a supplement. Whether that is Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood, Downton Abbey, Antiques Roadshow or a locally produced show on Ohio's public television stations, reading aloud from local newspapers to thousands of people who are blind or low vision, a series of videos created to help parents understand an individualized education program (IEP) or the state's focus on literacy shared in an online platform, a teacher in Columbus teaching Mandarin Chinese to a group of high school students in rural Ohio through interactive video conferencing, this is the future of education.

The Broadcast Educational Media Commission will continue to be one of many leading the way as the State of Ohio modernizes and energizes the future of education for all students and for all Ohioans.

Thank you again, Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the House Finance Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee for reading these thoughts.