

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, my name is Jenny Stupica and I am the Director of Manufacturing Engagement for ConxusNEO. I am providing proponent testimony today on behalf of ConxusNEO regarding House Bill 551. ConxusNEO is a connecting point, partnering with businesses to identify the skills they need to fill positions and build a talent pipeline, bringing together our business partners, educators, workforce programs, economic development organizations and government agencies to innovate solutions. Our footprint is Summit County where we have nearly 1,000 manufacturing companies.

Some may ask why House Bill 551 is important. The answer is not that complicated. While the employment in manufacturing might be projected to remain level for the next 5 years, looming retirements of nearly 30% of the manufacturing workforce are projected in the same time frame according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. This issue alone is enough to be worrisome. However, it's compounded by the fact that companies are also trying to hire new talent to handle the additional work that comes with company growth and expansion.

In a recent survey conducted by MAGNET, 80% of the manufacturers surveyed indicated they find hiring difficult, with 64% of the difficulty stemming from a lack of awareness or interest and a lack of the skills or education to be successful in a manufacturing career. Much of this stems from decades of misconception and misunderstanding of what manufacturing is and what it can provide in a career pathway. Young people have been guided to higher education as the path to success and haven't been exposed to the options and opportunities a career in manufacturing can provide. Skilled tradespeople are not in plentiful supply and historically companies have gone after those individuals by poaching from other manufacturers in their geographic area. Companies realize that's not effective, and they need to work together and find a way to "grow their own" to get the talent they want with the skills they need in the timeframe in which they need them.

Manufacturers are working on solutions by addressing these issues by joining sector partnerships, working with each other and local school systems and career tech programs to educate teachers, counselors, students and parents on the career opportunities in the manufacturing industry. Company representatives are spending time in the classrooms mentoring and coaching, communicating the necessary skills for career pathways, and attending career fairs. They are hosting students and teachers for facility tours, sponsoring summer camps, and providing shadowing opportunities, internships and registered pre-apprenticeships. They are hiring new graduates and showcasing the success of their partnerships with schools by participating in signing events that highlight the benefits to the company and the students. However, their ability to fully engage these students before they're 18 years old is limited by their inability to allow these students to learn on the actual equipment. They can teach the theory, but not the practical applications and operations. The students are limited in their ability to be productive and therefore the interaction becomes stagnant until they are of the allowed age to operate the machinery. This not only hinders the

company's ability to more quickly bring a future employee up to speed, but it halts the student's learning and creates a risk that the student will walk away from a career in manufacturing.

The earlier a company can get students involved in the actual work, the faster the students will feel they are learning and being productive, the better off they and the company will be. These students will become engaged in the work and are more likely to continue their employment in the manufacturing industry. However, this can only occur when the law is changed to allow the company to train the students to properly operate the equipment at an age below 18. The company will be able to hire more students as the students will be adding to the value of the work rather than doing busy work that is not interesting or does not expand their skill and knowledge. More students will find manufacturing to be a good career pathway because they will be able to learn and be productive early in their career and find the satisfaction of contributing to the company in a significant way before graduating from high school.

ConxusNEO would like to thank the bill's sponsors and encourage the committee to support House Bill 551. Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear here today. I'd be pleased to try to answer any questions that you might have.