

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chairman Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde, and members of the Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak in support of HB 512.

My name is David Zak, and I serve as the President and CEO for the Seneca Industrial and Economic Development Corporation, also known as SIEDC. Created in 1983 as a true public-private partnership, SIEDC serves as the lead economic, downtown, and community development organization for Tiffin and Seneca County in northwest Ohio. Over the course of my almost 22-year career, I have had the opportunity to do economic development work in communities like Fairfield County, part of the Columbus MSA; Springfield and Clark County; and more recently here in Tiffin, Ohio. I have worked twice for state development agency, and I serve on the Board and as one of the Vice Presidents for the Ohio Economic Development Association, an organization representing more than 600 economic development practitioners and partners around this great state.

What I want to speak about today is jobs. Specifically, unfilled jobs. You see, things are going very well in my community of 60,000 residents and 2,000 businesses. We have enjoyed robust economic growth the past four years, with more than \$330 million in new investment and 1400 new jobs being created. Twice in the past four years, we have ranked in the top 10 out of more than 500 communities of our size in the country. Our unemployment, like that of Ohio's, is below five percent.

That success, however, has slowed our progress. A recent survey of some of our larger employers revealed that 70 percent cannot find all the workers they need, and half of those won't expand because of that. The Board of Trustees of my organization, made up of almost 30 business and community leaders, identified workforce development as the number one strategic issue. Indeed, as I talk to many of my colleagues from around the state, I often hear the same thing. Companies cannot fill all of their jobs, and they cannot expand because of it. The current number of postings on OhioMeansJobs.com in my county is almost 3,000. In northwest Ohio, within a 60-mile radius of Toledo, there are more than 70,000.

For this reason, I am here to testify today and support the principles and spirit of this new Workforce & Education Restructuring Bill, and the intent to create a Department of Learning and Achievement, which brings together K12 education policy, the Ohio Department of Higher Education, and the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation. It brings together and aligns two of the most important producers of talent—K12 and higher education, and the largest user of talent – growing private sector businesses represented by the Office of Workforce Transformation.

To move the needle on workforce development in Ohio, we need bold, innovative, new ideas, and the Department of Learning and Achievement is one idea I think can really make a difference. My hope is that this bill will be a true win-win – significantly more student success and significantly more business and economic development success. The economic growth of my community, my region, and the state depends on it. Thank you.