



**House Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee
Testimony of Alesha Washington –Vice President, Government Advocacy
Greater Cleveland Partnership
June 7, 2017**

Chairman Duffey, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee, my name is Alesha Washington and I am the Vice President of Government Advocacy at the Greater Cleveland Partnership (GCP). GCP is the largest chamber of commerce in the State of Ohio representing 8,500 small, mid-market and large companies across Northeast Ohio. Our mission is to mobilize private sector leadership, expertise and resources to create jobs and leverage investment to improve the economic vitality of our region.

We do that in many ways, including working with key partners in the private and public sectors on employer-driven short-and long-term strategies to develop and attract a highly skilled workforce that supports the economic development goals of our region. That is why we offer our support for House Bill 166 – and its companion bill Senate Bill 3 – which proposes reforms for Ohio’s workforce development system to bring greater uniformity between federal and state law, connect students to career experiences and opportunities, and remove barriers to work for individuals returning home from the prison system.

Uniformity between federal and state law

With the recent reform of the Workforce Investment Act (now the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)), the federal government has created strategic goals and metrics for its largest funding streams and policies that guide job training and workforce development efforts in the nation. Because of WIOA, states, counties and regions will all be required to align their public funding and policies for workforce development to ensure tax payer dollars are effectively being spent to fill gaps in the labor market through training, education and better identification of future talent needs. GCP worked with its leaders to provide public comment on Ohio’s WIOA plan and we are engaged with Cuyahoga County’s local workforce investment board to inform the development of the county/regional

plan. The provisions in HB 166 and SB 3 that bring greater uniformity and updates to ensure that Ohio's Revised Code is aligned with the new federal law is necessary and efficient.

Connecting students to career experiences and opportunities

GCP has long championed local and regional initiatives to ensure middle, high school and college students are connected to work experiences that will guide their career paths and exploration. The provisions in HB 166 and SB 3 that would establish an option for career technical education students to participate in pre-apprenticeship training programs is supported by our leadership and is useful to enhance ongoing initiatives that seek to connect students and adults to careers in construction and other trades.

Removing barriers to work

GCP, and its affiliate the Council of Smaller Enterprises (COSE), have been supportive of commonsense criminal justice reforms that help to remove barriers to work for hard-to-employ populations. These efforts are needed to reduce public costs to our prison system and to ensure that we, as a state, can keep pace with the demand from employers in need of skilled talent. GCP, along with the seven metropolitan chambers of commerce and the Ohio Chamber, supported sweeping criminal justice reforms in 2011 that intended to divert low-level, non-violent criminals into community settings to reduce costs in Ohio's prison system. COSE has been supportive of Certificates for Qualification of Employment (CQEs) that include strong employer protections, and would recommend that any reforms to CQEs make the program more accessible and easier to use. The provisions in HB 166 and SB 3 regarding CQEs are generally aligned with our core principles around criminal justice reform and are a step in the right direction.

For all these reasons, we offer our support of HB 166 and SB 3. We commend Representative Reineke, Senator Beagle and the Office of Workforce Transformation for their tremendous work on these policy recommendations. I am happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you for your time.