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*Advocating for Life, Faith, and Freedom in the Public Square*

To: Members of the House Finance Committee

From: Chris Long, Ohio Christian Alliance President

Re: H.B. 166 – Urge House to retain 16 to 17-year old mentoring program as introduced by Governor DeWine and supported by career-technical education, construction and manufacturing advocates (H.B. 166, sections 4109.5, 4109.22, 4109.99). This proposal is good for Ohio's youth.

Thank you, Chairman Oelslager and members of the House Finance Committee, for receiving our testimony. The Ohio Christian Alliance commends the effort of Governor DeWine to support construction and manufacturing mentoring programs in Ohio by encouraging 16 and 17-year old mentoring programs in the construction trades.

We agree with the Governor that the career path for Ohio's next generational workforce needs to be varied and diverse. Not everyone needs to take the college path. Many students will opt to take advantage of the prolific trade career opportunities that are currently available, but that are in desperate need of being filled by trained personnel.

Trade jobs are currently in demand in Ohio and throughout the Midwest. Commercial construction jobs are in high demand right now in Ohio and companies are in desperate need of a trained workforce. We encourage our young people at an early age to consider what they would like to do. The current prohibition on power equipment use by 16 and 17-year olds is a detriment to these young people gaining experience and knowledge in what would be their chosen career path. We urge this committee to remove those barriers by retaining the language proposed by Governor DeWine that allows for these 16 and 17- year olds to be trained with the equipment and in the facilities that would advance their career paths. We urge the committee to retain the language in H.B. 166, sections 4109.5, 4109.22, and 4109.99.

As proposed in the budget, 16 and 17-year olds in Ohio would join almost every other state in the nation by allowing the use of specified power hand tools, as currently allowed by the U.S. Department of Labor and the national child labor laws. Presently, Ohio's under 18 labor laws are more restrictive than the federal government. The proposed mentoring program allows Ohio to match what 16 and 17-year olds are permitted to do in every other state provided they complete an OSHA-10 safety training program, comply with company drug testing policies and receive a job site mentor. All of this is provided voluntarily at the participating employer's expense.

In recent years many have come to realize the negative impact of removing industrial arts classes from middle and high school curriculums. Students are not gaining needed exposure and introduction to careers in construction or manufacturing. This mentoring program is a voluntary, company-led effort to reverse that.

Ohio is among the states with the highest level of student debt, and too many of those paying off college loans do not even have a degree to show for it.

We commend Governor DeWine for introducing this safety focused, voluntary mentoring program to increase student exposure to a rewarding and lucrative career path in construction and manufacturing. Students who participate in the program will be more likely to enroll in our Ohio career centers and increase their skills during their high school years. This will help them be job ready upon graduation, will prevent the accumulation of student debt, and will give them a promising career future.