

House Bill 166 – Operating Budget
Written Interested Party Testimony, May 8, 2019

Chair Oelslager and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on behalf of the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber and our nearly 4,000 members across the region. Our Government Affairs team works to deliver smart and innovative policy solutions to grow the economic prosperity and vibrancy of the region. We advocate with a bold voice for business in the areas of economic development, transportation and inclusion. And we strategically connect leaders and policy makers to strengthen the region's competitiveness.

We know that jobs follow talent. Businesses in our region will grow if they have a highly skilled workforce to compete in a global economy. We believe that governments at all levels should work to attract, develop and connect talent throughout the region. And there are many items in House Bill 166 that work to accomplish these goals.

We are encouraged by the strong and strategic investments the Administration and the House have proposed to increase the size of our talent pool. The \$25M of funding and incentives to provide more K-12 students opportunities to earn industry recognized credentials will give them more marketability for in-demand occupations paying above average wages, all while filling critical gaps in the regional labor supply. Additionally, providing \$1.5M to train teachers in computer science curriculum will help increase pipelines of tech talent in the state, a critical need for employers in Cincinnati.

In higher education, we support the increased investments and opportunities for first-generation and low-income students. The Ohio College Opportunity Grant and the Choose Ohio First Scholarship are two programs that have strong impacts for Ohio students and are well deserving of their funding increases. We are also pleased to see more innovation by providing more funding for textbooks and instructional materials at our state's community colleges and branch campuses.

Regarding economic development, the Chamber supports the tax credit for investments made in Ohio Opportunity Zones. The Greater Cincinnati Region is home to 40 designated zones. By providing this incentive, we are encouraging more Ohio money to remain in our state instead of fleeing to other parts of the country, creating additional positive impacts for the projects and people in these communities. We believe this will support regional efforts to promote economic prosperity and vibrancy for Cincinnati.

Finally, we also want to note our support for two programs introduced by the Administration but not included in the substitute bill. Funding of \$15M per fiscal year for Industry Recognized Credentials, referred to as TechCred, would have had a meaningful impact as many of our businesses are looking for innovative ways to upskill their workforce. This includes an initiative the Chamber launched with our members called Apprenti Cincinnati, an aptitude-based model to train individuals with coding and software development skills. Apprenti has a strong track record of selecting women, minorities and veterans into a field in which they are significantly underrepresented. Also, the \$2.5M per fiscal year to fund Industry Sector Partnerships would have played a meaningful role in the collaborative conversations taking place in the Cincinnati region, as business groups and nonprofit leaders seek to connect all Cincinnatians to job opportunities. We would encourage reinstatement of these funds.

Thank you for your consideration of our budget priorities. Please reach out with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Katie Eagan
VP of Government Affairs