

**May 19, 2015**

**Testimony- Chris Conrardy, EWI**

**Senate Finance – Workforce Subcommittee**

Chairman Beagle, Vice Chair Williams and members of the Senate Finance Workforce Sub-Committee, my name is Chris Conrardy. I am the Chief Technology Officer and VP of Strategic Initiatives at EWI. I am here today to ask for your support for state funding to create an Ohio Center for Manufacturing Innovation pilot project which will help Ohio manufacturers develop new technologies and remain globally competitive.

Ohio has one the largest and most diverse manufacturing sectors in the nation, accounting for about 16% of Ohio's GDP. Many recent reports highlight the importance of innovation to global manufacturing competitiveness. This is good news for Ohio because cost of labor is no longer the dominant factor, but rather technical innovation can give Ohio manufacturers a competitive advantage. This was highlighted in a 2014 Ohio House committee meeting held at EWI where Ohio manufacturers testified about the importance of technical innovation to their competitiveness. These included companies of all sizes, such as Rimrock Automation, Crown Equipment, AIDA America, Parker Hannifin, and Honda of America.

The challenge for these manufacturers is that the technology landscape is so complex and evolving so rapidly that they struggle to identify, develop, and implement new technologies fast enough to keep up with global competition.

That's where EWI comes in. EWI is an industry focused non-profit center of excellence that bridges the gap between Research & Development and commercialization, and helps industry adopt the latest manufacturing technologies to advance competitiveness. While born out of the Edison Center program more than 30 years ago, we are now a self-sufficient and employ over 150 people. EWI serves hundreds of manufacturers across all sectors, including automotive, aerospace, consumer products, energy systems, and medical devices. EWI helps these clients identify, develop, and apply manufacturing technologies to improve product performance, quality, reliability, and cost competitiveness. EWI's model is sustainable because it relies on client funding and not on operating subsidies from government.

Today, EWI focuses primarily on materials joining and allied technologies, but we feel our service model will translate to many other technology areas. We believe it would greatly benefit the state of Ohio to create additional innovation centers to further develop Ohio's manufacturing sector and workforce.

The Ohio Centers for Manufacturing Innovation concept was conceived in conjunction with representatives from industry and academia. The idea is to create a network of innovation centers across the state with each focused on a different technology specialty. Once established, these centers would sustain themselves by delivering innovation services to clients.

We are currently working with Sen. Bacon on an amendment that would create an Ohio Center for Manufacturing Innovation pilot project in order to demonstrate the benefits of the concept. The amendment seeks to provide \$8M over the next two fiscal years to support the establishment of the pilot center. The pilot would prove that EWI's successful model can be extended into other manufacturing technology areas and quickly achieve self-sufficiency.

Support for this pilot project is growing rapidly and includes Columbus Partnership, and a diverse range of manufacturers such as Lincoln Electric, Nirvana Energy Systems, RTI International Metals, Boeing, Henny Penny, Emerson and four of its affiliates with headquarters in Ohio – Leibert, Copeland, Fusite and Ridge as well as Wayne Trail Technologies, ContiTech, Magna Machine, Babcock & Wilcox, and Worthington Industries. These are just a few industry supporters; and we will provide the committee a more complete list following today's committee hearing.

The potential benefits to Ohio are many. The pilot project will create differentiating capabilities in the state that will 1) bridge the gap between R&D and commercialization, 2) make existing manufacturers more competitive, 3) attract and grow new technology companies, and 4) support the growth of Ohio's manufacturing workforce of tomorrow.

Thank you for allowing me to testify, at this time I am happy to answer any questions.