

March 28, 2016

Dear Chairman Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee:

I write today as a proponent of the High School Career Opportunity Act, House Bill 98, sponsored by two of our Franklin County partners in the legislature, Representatives Duffey and Boggs. I was pleased to hear that a forum moderated in 2015 by the Columbus Chamber of Commerce inspired the legislation, and encourage you all to attend future events hosted by the Chamber in hopes of being equally inspired!

Founded in 1884, the Columbus Chamber of Commerce is the leading voice of business within the 11-county Columbus Region, with more than 1,350 members employing over 500,000 workers. Not only is education and workforce development a mission pillar of the Columbus Chamber, but it is also a platform of the Columbus Chamber's Public Policy Agenda, which is approved by our full board of directors.

The Columbus Region boasts unemployment figures below the state and national averages.<sup>1</sup> We are home to one of the fastest growing cities in the Midwest, and a workforce growing at a rate substantially above the national average. We have a stable economic base, in which no industry accounts for more than 18 percent of employment, as evidenced by the 92 different segments represented by the Chamber. Despite all these factors, the current labor pool fails to meet the workforce needs of the region, and makes talent attraction and retention a primary focus of our employers.

The Columbus Chamber supports a targeted strategy that aligns business and education to create a pipeline of workers ready to address the skills gap. Research shows that early exposure to a range of career education information and opportunities results in improved post-secondary outcomes. Therefore, we aim to advance policies that will prepare students to be ready to succeed upon graduation, including early introduction to employment options. H.B. 98 directly achieves that goal by allowing employers at least two opportunities per school year to present career and employment information to high school students.

To show our own commitment to these initiatives, the Chamber will soon host our annual Columbus Region All Industry Showcase and Career Fair, which will bring together hundreds of employers and job seekers throughout the region, including busloads of school children. We applaud the school districts that already partner with our members and employers to satisfy the requirements of H.B. 98, but support full compliance by those that do not.

The Columbus Chamber urges support and swift passage of H.B. 98.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Holly Gross  
Vice President, Government Relations

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<sup>1</sup> Columbus Region: 4.2%; Ohio: 5.0%; U.S.: 4.7% (Jan 2017)