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Honorable Ryan Smith
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Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Ryan, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the Ohio House of Representatives Finance Committee,

I am honored to be speaking before you all today on behalf of students in Ohio, in support of House Bill 508, a bill that establishes the OhioCorps Pilot Project.

To introduce myself, my name is Adrian Williams and I am a Neuroscience-Pre/Medicine major at Wright State University. I am currently involved in Wright State University's Student Government, serving on the Legislative Governance and the Accessibility, Health and Safety Committees. I have lobbied in support of House Bill 337, the elimination of sales tax on textbooks for students in Ohio, which recently unanimously passed committee. I also serve as the President of the Multicultural Association of Pre-Medical Students on campus, which has further ignited my passion to help make education more accessible for all, regardless of their race or station in life.

Working in the public health sector in the community has shown me firsthand the damage that the Opioid Crisis has done to our state, and our country as a whole. Seeing the way it has destroyed families and relationships, fostered a sense of hopelessness in the community, and cost the healthcare system billions upon billions of dollars, has motivated me to do something. Over 30% of children in foster care today are there as a result of parents or caretakers using drugs, and the problem is quickly getting worse. More than 64,000 people died as a result of opioid overdose last year, more than double the number ten years ago. This is a crisis must be addressed, and it must be addressed soon.

House Bill 508 is a step in the right direction to make sure that young children, and those put at risk from caretakers abusing drugs, will have a chance at an education.

House Bill 508 will not only establish the OhioCorps Pilot Program in Southeast Ohio with the goal of steering "at-risk" children to a path of Higher Education, it will also provide mentorship from university students, and will establish a scholarship for "at-risk" students that complete the OhioCorps Program and meet criteria.

As a college student who has spent a considerable amount of time working with at-risk children, I can say without a doubt that this program would do so much good in the community and for the next generation. College students would not only gain experience helping and mentoring these at-risk individuals, but they can see firsthand the effects of opioids and drug abuse and have a chance to make a direct impact in their communities.

My grandfather, Larry Davis, was a Vietnam Veteran and a brilliant electrician, however, he turned to heroin to deal with his PTSD. He passed away a few months ago due to his addiction. Having a front row seat to the damage that heroin and opioids as a whole cause has motivated me to do all I can to help those affected. This affects everyone in our society, and we must do something.

Ohio Corps will give “at-risk” children opportunities to receive a college education and be mentored along the way. If passed, I am beyond confident that this bill will make a difference in our state. I know that my peers would jump at the chance to mentor and assist students, and I have worked with many children and young adults who would be beyond grateful for a program like this to help them attend college. I am confident that this pilot program will have countless benefits and one day be expanded.

One of my favorite sayings is that education is the last great equalizer. As you contemplate this bill, I urge you all to think of the countless students that would benefit from a program like this, and the impact those students can one day have in society. OhioCorps is a step in the right direction, and I urge you as lawmakers to please take that step.

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Ryan, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the Ohio House of Representatives Finance Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to address you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.