



*BEFORE THE HOUSE HIGHER EDUCATION AND
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
TESTIMONY ON SB 3
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7, 2017*

Chair Duffey, Vice-Chair Antani, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today regarding Senate Bill 3. My name is Brandon Ogden and I am the Director of the Ohio Small Business Council (OSBC) for the Ohio Chamber of Commerce. The Ohio Chamber is the state's leading business advocate, as we represent nearly 8,000 companies that do business in Ohio. Our mission is to aggressively champion free enterprise, economic competitiveness and growth for the benefit of all Ohioans. The Ohio Chamber of Commerce is a champion for Ohio business so that our state enjoys economic growth and prosperity. In my role, I aim to fulfil the Ohio Small Business Council's mission, which is to promote the establishment, growth and vitality of small business in Ohio. In addition to OSBC, I oversee the Education and Workforce Development Committee which in part carries the mission of responding to the needs of Ohio employers in finding qualified, well-trained employees.

Firstly, I want to thank Senators Beagle and Balderson for bringing forward this legislation aimed at improving the workforce climate in the state of Ohio. Employers throughout the state are doing as much as they can to satisfy their own staffing and workforce needs but are grateful when legislative solutions are available. Ohio employers face many challenges when it comes to finding skilled talent, training employees and retaining staff. The two challenges that come immediately to mind are the opiate crisis and the skills gaps that exist within certain industries. SB 3 includes provisions to address the latter of the challenges.

The intent of my testimony is to focus on just the provisions of SB 3 which we feel have the broadest business impact and are supported by our members. I want to preface my remarks by stating that they are in no particular order of importance or Ohio Chamber priority. First, we support the idea of an in-demand jobs week. A week during the school year that is dedicated to promoting the jobs of the future to middle school and high school students is a valuable method in which to expose them to local and regional employers. Additionally, providing businesses the opportunity to showcase themselves is crucial in informing students and parents of the educational path necessary to attain these jobs. On another note, I would even go as far as suggesting that it be referred to as “In-Demand Careers Week” given that the jobs should be sustainable and lead to lifelong careers. However, given the state’s branding of in-demand “jobs” over the past several years I recognize that this type of change is not plausible.

Another provision which we feel has the potential to strengthen the future of Ohio’s workforce is the OhioMeansJobs-Ready seal, which can be affixed to the diplomas of eligible high school graduates. We hear time-and-time again from employers that many job applicants do not have the soft skills necessary to work in certain environments. We recognize that most or all of these competencies should be learned at home, but for students that do not have a suitable home life, they may need to gain these skills at school. Particularly, the work ready skills such as teamwork, problem solving, reliability and punctuality are keys to success in virtually any workplace. The lack of soft skills cuts through so many industries, especially those in which employees engage with customers. As nearly eighty percent of all business start-ups are in service related fields, the importance of soft skills has become increasingly important.

The next provision that the Ohio Chamber is pleased to have inserted into SB 3 is the option for career-technical students to enter into approved pre-apprenticeship programs. Having hands-on training and practical real-world experience is often how students develop the job specific hard skills and determine whether they wish to pursue a career in that field. In fact, in many trades you cannot enter into the full-time workforce without having participated in a pre-apprenticeship or apprenticeship program.

Finally, the provision related to the creation of a workforce career counseling model is encouraging to see contained within SB 3. Workforce development is much like economic development in that it is most effective when regionally coordinated. Of course, I do have to say that I have heard from local chambers of commerce and local school boards that this level of collaboration is already taking place but it is not yet taking place around the entire state in any uniform manner. Furthermore, much like the previously mentioned provision, the job shadowing, co-op and internship opportunities associated with a career counseling model are the types of opportunities that allow students to determine their career interests and passions.

The Ohio Chamber applauds the efforts of the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation in developing workforce provisions and implementing recommendations provided by the Executive Workforce Board. We also understand that education and workforce development often require an extensive financial investment so we are pleased that the provisions contained within Senate Bill 3, in general, happen to be budget neutral. We also recognize that these provisions are just a piece of the workforce development pie. Improving collaboration between educators and employers is critically important as our economy depends on it. Chairman Duffey, I thank you once again for the opportunity to testify and I would welcome any questions at this time.