

February 7, 2018

Dear Chair Lehner, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Education Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to provide testify in support of House Bill 98.

Founded in 1884, the Columbus Chamber of Commerce (CCOC) 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.¹ 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 industry segments represented by the Chamber. These forces make talent attraction and retention a primary focus of employers in the region.

The Columbus Chamber supports a targeted strategy that aligns business and education to create a pipeline of skilled workers to satisfy the workforce needs of the region. 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 exposure to career opportunities. This legislation 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 recently co-hosted an event with Columbus City Schools that connected business leaders with educators to facilitate the exchange of knowledge that we hope will be fused into the workplace and classroom to better prepare students to enter the workforce upon graduation. We also host our annual Columbus Region All Industry Showcase and Career Fair, which brings together hundreds of employers and job seekers throughout the region, including busloads of school children.

We applaud the school districts that partner with our members and employers throughout the state that already satisfy the requirements of the proposal, but support full compliance by those who do not.

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

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Holly Gross
Vice President, Government Relations

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