

**Written Testimony From**  
**ROXANE G. SOMERLOT, - Director, Marion County Job & Family Services**  
**On Behalf of**  
**Ohio Job & Family Services Directors' Association – Workforce Committee**  
**OhioMeansJobs – Marion County and Marion City Schools**  
**In Support of**  
**Senate Bill 3 – Workforce**  
**Before the**  
**Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee**  
**Tuesday, March 14, 2017**

Chairman LaRose, Vice Chair Kunze, and members of the Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on SB 3 regarding Ohio's workforce development system. My name is Roxane Somerlot and I am the Marion County Director of Job and Family Services which includes responsibility for our county's Ohio Means Jobs Center. I am also Chairperson for the Ohio Job & Family Service Directors' Association Workforce Committee.

I am submitting testimony in support of SB 3 as a public workforce development practitioner, an active partner with my K-12 education system, and an invested member of my community.

SB 3 addresses important issues related to the early development of a skilled and ready workforce and provides opportunities to build upon the partnerships which exist between the public workforce system, the employer community, and K-12 education

Based upon my personal experience in Marion County, our schools are aggressively seeking input from local businesses and relevant organizations to revolutionize curriculum and instructional methods with the goal of responding to the needs of local economies and ensuring student success beyond graduation. SB 3 furthers this goal by affirming the good work which is underway and providing for specific means to encourage and replicate this work across Ohio.

**OhioMeansJobs-Ready Certificate**

SB 3 calls for the development of a certification process to support a student's understanding and mastery of fundamental workplace expectations as demonstrated by "soft (behavioral) skills" as well as core objective skills. This certification directly responds to the priorities voiced by employers as a critical need among new entrants into the workforce. The public workforce system, through the OhioMeansJobs Center in each county has significant experience in programming for youth which addresses soft skills and job readiness. Therefore, OMJ Center staff are well positioned and eager to assist with the local implementation of the certification initiative.

I'd like to share the story of what's being done in Marion to speak in support of this bill. Marion City Schools made an effort to reach out to area businesses and agencies like OhioMeansJobs Marion County

to see how the district could better serve the community. Much of what administrators, including Superintendent Gary Barber, heard was that employers needed people ready to work. This included technical skills as well as what's popularly referred to as soft skills.

Marion City Schools answered this call by inviting both educators and business and community leaders to the table. In a series of monthly meetings, we worked together to develop the Diploma Plus Acceptance initiative. This initiative's main goal is to ensure that all students leave high school ready for college and/or careers by earning college credit, an industry recognized credential or both. As a result of this work, strong links have been created between area employers and our district. Marion City Schools continues to invite OhioMeansJobs Marion County and other agencies like the Marion Area Chamber of Commerce and the Marion Community Area New Development Organization, our economic development agency, to give their input and support in the form of quarterly advisory committee meetings.

The Diploma Plus Acceptance effort is focused on making sure students have what they need to leave high school and enroll in a technical program or apprenticeship, a two- or four-year college, the military or a high demand job that pays life sustaining wages. Students are able to take college level courses while in high school that are geared towards their interests. Through our advanced career technical programs offered at our high school such as Global Logistics and Supply Chain Management, Integrated Production Technologies, and Health Technologies students are able to earn stackable credentials that show their preparedness to work in a specific industry. Marion City Schools' JROTC program prepares students who may want to enlist in the military.

Our other initiative, Simulated Workplace, focuses on preparing students with both soft skills and technical skills. Technical classrooms are transformed into simulated student-led companies that teach students what it's like to be in the workplace.

This initiative requires the support of our business and industrial partners. We invite representatives from area companies into our classrooms to rate the effectiveness of our training programs. They evaluate areas like procedures, processes and skill set attainment. They adjudicate student projects, and provide input on the career tech curriculum in each course.

This not only prepares our students for the world of work. It gives these companies a way to collaborate with Marion City Schools to develop better training programs that prepare students to work in their facilities. They can speak with potential employees and even recruit employees through the Simulated Workplace program.

OhioMeansJobs Marion County and Marion City Schools believe that educators, community agencies and businesses need to work together to help a community succeed. We are setting an example in Marion as we invite everyone to the table and create programming that responds to the needs of area employers. Rather than only focus on college, we are focusing on preparing students for both college and careers. This effort will help area employers in need of specific skills and let us fill jobs available in our region.

## **In-Demand Jobs Week**

SB 3 establishes May 1<sup>st</sup> through May 7<sup>th</sup> as In-Demand Jobs Week and calls upon the local educational community to strategically inform students and parents of the in-demand career options available locally and statewide. Job fairs and company site visits are expected activities which will ensure that local businesses are able to directly communicate the knowledge, skill and abilities required in their specific workplace.

Currently, OhioMeansJobs Centers in many parts of the state work with K-12 school districts to sponsor and coordinate events which bring together students with area businesses. One such example is the OhioMeansJobs-Allen County MakerFest Job Fair. In its third year, more than 1,100 students from 17 career tech and high schools were able to connect with 52 employers to learn all about what kind of job opportunities their community can offer them. Similar events occur annually in all regions of the state. OhioMeansJobs Centers are available to leverage their experience and established employer relationships in support of In-Demand Jobs Week activities which add value for all participants.

## **Summary**

The public workforce system is charged with linking the right individual with the right employer at the right time. Our ability to meet this charge is predicated on a workforce which is ready, able and willing to engage with employers in a mutually beneficial career pathway.

SB 3 is important in strengthening relationships with Ohio's business and operationalizing concepts which serve to enhance student success and workforce competitiveness.

Respectfully,

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