



OHIO

Chairman Hackett, Vice-Chairman Huffman, and Ranking Member Thomas,

My name is Chris Burns, and I am an executive with Encore Technologies, located in the Cincinnati suburb of Norwood.

Encore is a full-service technology company that started from scratch in 2016 and we have grown to 150 employees with revenue of \$80 million last year. Our growth, as fast as it has been, is slowed only by the lack of trained IT employees in this state and region.

As business leaders, we rely on Americans to be ready and able to do the work of our nation. As members of ReadyNation, the nonprofit network of 60 business executives in Ohio, we support smart policies that put kids on the right track early in life, so they reach adulthood with the skills our economy demands. This is the missing ingredient in our current workforce, but you can help us change that.

Research shows that the skills gap starts in early childhood, and far too many at-risk children are never able to catch-up to their peers. Reports indicate that 65% of Ohio jobs in 2025 will require a degree or credential beyond high school, but currently only 43% of the adult workforce is equipped with such skills. It is clear many youth are entering adulthood unprepared for careers in technical, public safety, health care, and manufacturing fields. That's why we support provisions in the Ohio biennial budget, HB 166, which increase investments in evidence-based policies that serve at-risk kids, especially those in publicly funded child care, evidence-based home visiting, and the foster care system.

As employers, we know finding quality and consistent child care is a real obstacle for many employees. Studies show this is keeping people out of the workforce and preventing them from taking on larger roles, hampering productivity. ReadyNation's new study examining the economic impacts of the nation's child care crisis on working parents, employers, and taxpayers describes an annual cost of \$57 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue.

We applaud the proposed spending of increased federal dollars through the Child Care Development Block Grant on increasing rates for providers, which have been woefully low for far too long. This is a critical first step to supporting our system, but significant state investments are still needed to ensure quality and increase eligibility for publicly funded child care to 150% of the federal poverty level—a clear priority for Governor DeWine in the coming years. When we fund this type of investment, and we believe this is an investment as opposed to a cost, the current workforce expands because these parents are able to work and we desperately need them in the workforce today.

We also applaud the increased funding for voluntary home visiting programs, shown to have benefits beyond the families of at-risk mothers. Mentorship from a trained educator, during the first few years of a child's life, equips parents with the tools and skills they need to stimulate their child's development and avoid harmful parenting practices that can result in neglect or abuse. High-quality home visiting also strengthens the economy by fostering families' economic independence. When at-risk parents take advantage of the resources available in voluntary home visiting, entire communities benefit. New reports are proving this to be the case.

Additionally, the budget supports investments in foster care including funding the Bridges program, which provides supports to those transitioning out of foster care at age 18. This support has been shown to help youth in the final stages of their journey to independence, and ready them for skilled positions in the workforce.

We are blessed that you and your colleagues have helped Ohio become one of the top states for attracting millennials and for that we are thankful. It is helping to fill this critical gap. We are grateful for past efforts to address these issues and understand the realities of working with limited resources. In order for Ohio's workforce to continue to evolve with the needs of the modern economy, the data shows it is important to make early investments in proven programs to strengthen our future generation.

Thank you for your time and support. I'm happy to answer any questions.