

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, and Members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee, I am Renee Smith President of the Fostoria Economic Development Corporation and Managing Director of the Fostoria Learning Center. Thank you so much for your time today and allowing me to provide this testimony in support of SB 178.

In my roles, I have the distinct advantage of seeing our ongoing workforce issues from 2 sides – from the employers’ perspective as well as from educators’ perspective. There is a significant disconnect between these two perspectives. This disconnect is one of the reasons I am such an advocate for SB 178 as it will focus on improved academic and workforce skills through accountability and outcomes in education and career readiness.

At the Fostoria Learning Center, we see the ongoing needs for remediation, specifically in math and reading. We see kids as young as 16 and individuals as old as 84 utilizing these services on a weekly basis. One of the biggest issues we hear from employers is the need for this remediation amongst new hires within their companies. This is unacceptable and could be avoided in many instances. We need accountability to ensure these basic educational skills are being achieved, which Senate Bill 178 is an advocate for putting in place.

At the Fostoria Learning Center, we advocate for all types of trainings, specifically targeting short-term certificate programs (typically less than 160 hours) in an effort to upskill existing members of the workforce, uplifting those not currently in the workforce, and exposing future members of the workforce. We focus on areas of training such as manufacturing, welding, medical, and others. Our trainings are focused on skilled trades careers as this is the biggest need we see in both short-term and long-term workforce trends. In Fostoria, and in many other areas of Ohio, we have hundreds of kids each year who have no interest in going to college, but they are not being properly exposed to other career pathways. We need to do better in preparing our youth for the workforce – whether it be with specific vocational trainings or in soft skill career development. These youth are our future, and we need to do a better job of exposing them to in demand careers and vocational pathways.

Senate Bill 178 is needed if we, as a State, want to truly advocate for our youth while simultaneously advocating for our businesses and their current and future workforce needs. We must ensure accountability for our children and their education so our future workforce is well prepared and can truly succeed! Ohio needs to develop a pipeline of consistent communication and collaboration between our k-12 districts and our career-tech leadership. I believe Senate Bill 178 is a needed and necessary step in ensuring this occurs.

Thank you all for your time today.