



Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee

Senate Bill 135 / Proponent Testimony of John Zehentbauer, Superintendent Mahoning County Career and Technical Center

4-27-21

Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Williams, and Members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is John Zehentbauer, and I am superintendent of Mahoning County Career and Technical Center. I am speaking today on behalf of my school (including our Ohio Technical Center (OTC) division, which focuses on adult education), as well as the Ohio Association for Career Technical Education (Ohio ACTE) and the Ohio Association of Career Technical Superintendents (OACTS). These Associations not only represent the state's 91 Public Career-Technical Schools (including its 49 Career Centers), but also its 52 Ohio Technical Centers (OTCs)—which offer short-term adult technical training specifically designed to meet Ohio's diverse, regional workforce needs.

An OTC in Ohio typically trains anywhere from 150-3,000 adult students and incumbent workers each year via full-time career-tech programs, ASPIRE/GED programming, or employee / business and industry regional training. OTC graduation, job placement, and attainment rates are exemplary. Currently Mahoning County CTC has a 88.3% graduation rate, 78% job placement or continuing education rate, and an 88% industry credential attainment rate (based on FY19 ODHE HEI data). We also partnered with more than 12 employers on 20 incumbent worker training projects in Ohio in FY20. Most recently, and throughout the Pandemic, these training partnerships helped companies prevent lay-offs, and re-open and re-tool their employees, while also helping dislocated Ohio workers re-skill and up-skill to get back into the workforce. Along with the other 52 OTCs located across the state, we play an integral role in the state's higher education framework.

Background on OTCs: OTCs are funded through and regulated by the Ohio Department of Higher Education, and provide a host of educational services for adult students and businesses. Adults can earn certificates, licenses and other credentials in typically a year or less. Although normally housed and governed by either the Career Center (i.e., Joint Vocational School District), or the comprehensive school district of which they are part, each OTC "stands alone" and has a separate funding mechanism than their secondary counterpart.

Support for Second Chance Voucher Program: Among other provisions, SB 135 proposes to redirect a portion of tuition / fees paid by a student who disenrolled from a state university (but did not graduate), to a qualifying college or technical school (including an OTC)—so that the student can (at a minimum) receive technical training and education necessary to enter the workforce. We support this concept as it would make career-technical education more

affordable for many adult students and indeed, would appear to offer qualifying students a “second chance” at higher education.

Unfortunately there is still a workforce shortage in Ohio that policymakers continually attempt to address each year in good faith. Thankfully Ohio’s career-technical education infrastructure is strong and can support increased education / training demands through the numerous pathways we offer for adults to help “fill the skills gap.”

To be clear, there is still a need for, and high value associated with, Masters and Bachelor Degree Programs. But the majority of employment opportunities are currently in skilled trades. OTCs are the resource for the majority of adults to learn skills in short-term training programs that lead to high-paying, high-demand jobs. By working directly to develop training specific to their needs, we are also vital to helping Ohio employers build a stronger, more skilled workforce.

Thank you for your support and allowing us to testify. I would also encourage committee members to visit their local OTC and see first-hand the incredible work they are doing to strengthen the state’s workforce. Thanks again and I would be happy to answer any questions.