



## **Ohio House Finance Committee**

**Chair Jay Edwards, Vice Chair Jeff LaRe, and Ranking Member Rose Bride Sweeney**

**Testimony By: Lori McCleese, President, Junior Achievement of North Central Ohio**

Thank you, Chair Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney and distinguished members of the Ohio House of Representatives. My name is Lori McCleese and since 2019, I have served as the President of Junior Achievement of North Central Ohio which encompasses sixteen Ohio counties. My foray into nonprofit leadership is a second career, as I spent my 20's and 30's working in senior leadership positions for several Ohio banks. I have always been passionate about education, mentorship, and youth development and Junior Achievement has been the most rewarding position I have ever held.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 33 requesting the House Finance Committee support \$3 million in funding in the FY 24 -25 Ohio operating budget to expand workforce development, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship programming to Ohio students.

At JA of North Central Ohio, we work with over 200 business and organizational partners, all of which share one common challenge: filling their open positions. We also work with over 100 school districts who *also* have shared challenges; fulfilling all that is required of them from an academic and testing perspective, negotiating contracts, dealing with parents, and ***navigating the largest youth mental health crisis in our lifetime.***

In our discussions with both schools and businesses, it is abundantly clear that putting the responsibility of workforce development on our schools is simply not working. Like all other employers in the state – they are facing teacher shortages, bus driver shortages, and everything in between.

In addition, JA participates in numerous business advisory councils throughout our region, and while there are great ideas shared, the execution is lacking. Most do not have the time or resources to do the work. But Junior Achievement *does* and *is* doing the work. Across the state, we have engaged tens of thousands of middle and high school students in our JA Inspire events which showcase thousands of careers at hundreds of employers in our state. We are highly focused on Ohio's in demand jobs, and have built strong partnerships with post-secondary institutions, trade organizations and the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Junior Achievement does not just showcase careers.

- We teach students the soft skills needed to be successful in work and life.
- We connect students with job shadow opportunities, internships, and apprenticeships.
- We are working with school partners across the state to help them meet the new full semester financial literacy mandate with our JA course that meets every standard in the state model curriculum.
- We have nationally recognized entrepreneurship programs...and much more.
- And we are entirely privately funded.

JA of North Central Ohio, JA of Greater Cleveland and JA of Mahoning Valley collectively raise \$3 million each year from the business and foundation communities in our 24 counties. With that \$3 million, we reach nearly 55,000 students each year which amounts to less than \$100 per student. 55,000 students is approximately 10% of the students in our counties. We need your help to do more, not only in our metro areas, but also in our rural communities where the financial resources are inadequate to support the work that is **so desperately needed**. Don't the students in our rural communities **deserve** access to the same programs and services that are so widespread in our urban and suburban areas? They do – but it's not happening. Because of money. As an example, we are currently working to implement experiential high school entrepreneurship programming in Coshocton County, whereas this type of programming has been in place for decades in our suburban areas.

In terms of career exploration, were it not for Junior Achievement, students in Canton would never know there are excellent career opportunities in Ashland County, Marion County, and other counties they have never been to in their lifetime. Likewise, how are students in Carroll County expected to know that there are amazing employers like Schaeffler and Ventrac in Wayne County?

In 2021 The Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation awarded its first ever \$100,000 youth pathways grant to Junior Achievement to help expose students to careers in agriculture and environmental science. An Akron Public School teacher shared how happy she was to see agriculture represented at our Inspire event because she has students interested in that career pathway and they do not work with any agriculture companies. Agriculture is not only people on tractors – it is science, engineering, drone technology and so much more.

In closing, Junior Achievement is a conduit between Ohio's students and the business community. We are doing the work everyone is talking about but are severely limited because of financial resources. Giving one more thing for our schools to do is not the answer, even if the funding follows.

One of my favorite quotes is *"If you want to see different results, do things differently."* We are asking you to do things differently and let us show you the results.

With sincere appreciation.



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