

House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
HB 135 Proponent Testimony
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Chairman Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and other members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for HB 135. My name is Stephanie Jolliff and it is my pleasure to be here today and testify on behalf of this bill. For the past 26 years, I have had the opportunity to open my classroom doors to young people in Marion and Hardin County. I currently teach at Ridgemont Local School District in southern Hardin County. I have chosen to stay in the classroom for 26 years because of the opportunities provided to young people on an individual basis through agricultural education.

I have been fortunate to teach hundreds of students and prepare them for life outside of high school. The preparation of young people for ever-changing and evolving career fields is challenging and emotionally exhausting. Every student walks through my classroom door with an individual story and is seeking assistance to help them find the first steps to a productive future after high school.

As educators, we are continually trying to create authentic experiences and lessons to help young people grow into responsible adults. The reality is that the agricultural industry is innovating at a rapid pace and we must evolve the way we view teaching this generation. In agricultural education, a solid foundation for innovative teaching and learning is achieved through Work-Based Learning with Supervised Agricultural Experience programs. Supervised Agricultural Experience programs or SAEs provide diverse experiences with a solid foundation for career exploration through skill-building opportunities that develop transferable skills. Over my 26 years, I have advocated for young learners to interact with industry experts and businesses in Ohio and across the country. Students have had the opportunity to find their career paths by expanding their mentorship networks with connections through agricultural education. I am a firm believer that SAEs take students learning beyond the classroom walls and are valid strategies to redesign traditional views of education tied to seat time.

I would like to share just a few SAE examples that I have advocated for over the years that occurred beyond the classroom walls. I had a 16-year-old high school student who knew his path; his lifelong goal was to become a full-time farmer right after high school. As a junior and senior he decided he needed to secure his Pesticide Applicator license and Ohio Grain Merchandising License, both are tested licenses from the Ohio Department of Agriculture. He attended classes at night and online but needed to travel during school to take his test for those licenses. At the time, we had an administration that supported students' SAE programs that

needed to occur during the school day. This young man was successful in his testing and used those skills to expand his family farm, and he currently farms over 3,000 acres.

Another example in my program occurred under a different administration that did not allow students to miss school for their SAE projects. My daughters are both extremely active in the cattle industry and sought to gain skills to improve their cattle genetics by becoming certified in artificial insemination of cattle. They attend a three-day training program to become certified to breed their heifers to save money and improve their genetics. In addition, they traveled to workshops and seminars to connect with industry experts across the country. My one daughter advanced her desire to be an agricultural communicator by serving on the National Maine Anjou Association Junior board and uses those skills as a communication director at an energy cooperative today. In addition, my daughters attended National FFA Animal Science workshops with professors at Kansas State University and students from across the country. While these were amazing opportunities, my daughters and their peers also attended FFA competitions, including national and state FFA conventions, FFA Career Development Events, and FFA activities during the school day. While these were formative experiences that build resumes and prepare them for their future careers the administration did not excuse any of them, hence they were solicited with a truancy letter from the school. All while maintaining a 3.75 GPA.

More recently, I've had young men interested in animal science and sheep reproduction. The one young man's long-term goal is to own a high-performing sheep flock that will produce sires to increase meat production to feed our growing population. Their science fair project focused on measuring thawing strategies and analyzing the viability of the semen. They had the opportunity to travel to one of the leading sheep breeding research facilities in Indiana to work with researchers from Australia and New Zealand to experience cutting-edge technology firsthand. Due to another change in administration, this experience that occurred during the school day was school excused.

Each of these examples provides a solid foundation that has developed each student and provided educational experiences that I desire to provide in my classroom but offer individual engagement that goes far beyond classroom walls. Career technical education and agricultural education are the foundation of providing future leaders that will advocate for agriculture, feed our growing population, and provide the energy needed to fulfill the growing resources our world needs. The challenge that I have directly faced is that each administration interprets the guidelines for educational experiences differently. Supervised Agricultural Experience programs directly link to Work Based Learning and afford students mentors to partner with educators to increase career opportunities and awareness for our students. Every student deserves the opportunity to identify their individual growth goals and seek opportunities to experience far more than individuals inside school walls can provide by themselves.

The stories I have shared today are not unique to my school and program. As the past president and current treasurer of the Ohio Association of Agricultural Educators, I have witnessed outstanding teachers across the state advocating for their students to have more opportunities outside the classroom outside of the scheduled school day. This bill will open the door and provide additional opportunities for our youth. It is critical that we advocate for this bill. I hear stories every month about the different interpretations of attendance policies with FFA and Supervised Agricultural Experience programs, and it is frustrating for students, families, and agricultural professionals. We must look at every one of our students and provide them with additional opportunities beyond the school walls. This bill provides consistency with the interpretation of school attendance policies by administrators. This bill supports students who want to go above and beyond and reach for more to be prepared for their future careers. I appreciate your support and dedication to our future leaders. Thank you and I'd be happy to answer any questions you have at this time.