



April 30, 2023

Dear Chairman Brenner, Vice-Chair O'Brien, and Ranking Member Ingram,

My name is Cris Gulacy-Worrel and I am the Vice President of Oakmont Education. We operate 16 public charter schools across Ohio, serving nearly 4,000 at-risk youth. We prioritize a whole-student approach with an emphasis on career technical education, credentialing, workforce training, and placement. Our average student is 18.5 years old, reads on a 5th grade reading level, and has completed only 20% of the credits needed to graduate. Our students have been failed by multiple systems, including multiple high schools, but we have found solutions that work toward changing this narrative that plagues too many communities.

I am here to testify in support of incoming proposed amendments specific to Dropout Recovery Schools providing in-house career technical education to some of our state's most vulnerable students. Every 26 seconds, a student drops out of high school, costing approximately \$300,000 over their lifetime. We also know that around 75% of adjudicated men are high school dropouts, and it is much less costly to re-engage opportunity youth than it is to continue filling and funding prisons. The Ohio Department of Education reported that approximately 22,000 students dropped out in 2020, with a projected cost to Ohio communities of nearly seven billion dollars over their lifetimes. We must take innovative and relevant approaches to engaging and educating opportunity youth. It is time to act.

As a former dropout and non-linear learner, I can attest that there is nothing out there to support those students who are not college-bound but are career-bound after high school. That is why Oakmont Education has a 74% placement rate across the network of schools we serve, tracking and supporting graduates for a full year after placement. We need your help to expand necessary programs and schools to serve these students.

Ohio has a skilled-worker shortage, and funding these programs will provide more opportunities for Dropout Recovery Schools to offer industry-recognized credentials to their students and prepare them for quality and productive lives after high school. We are thrilled that Intel is bringing so many highly specialized jobs and careers into our state, but have we thought about the 7,000 construction jobs needed to build the new Intel facility itself?

We will be asking the Senate to consider critical amendments that will directly aid dropout recovery students participating in career technical education and credentialing opportunities. We look forward to meeting with each of you to further discuss these amendments over the course of the budget process.



This problem will not go away on its own, and we need your help to support the expansion of necessary programs and schools that are changing lives for our opportunity youth. We invite you to visit a school as your schedule permits. Thank you for your consideration and time. I am here with my colleague; Dr. Jerry Farley, and we are happy to take questions.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cris Gulacy-Worrel'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Cris Gulacy-Worrel
Vice President
Oakmont Education