

May 1, 2023

Dear Chairman Brenner, Vice-Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and other members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding my support of incoming proposed amendments, specific to Dropout Recovery Schools providing in-house Career Technical Education.

My name is Jerry Farley and for more than a decade, I have devoted my career to helping develop programs that provide some of Ohio's most vulnerable youth a path out of poverty and into careers that pay a sustainable living wage. At Oakmont schools we serve opportunity youth and 1/3 of our students are "Systems Involved Youth", meaning they are involved in the juvenile court system, the foster care system, or the systems we have in place to deal with homelessness.

In the most recent CNBC Report on "America's Top States for Business", Ohio ranks 15<sup>th</sup> overall; however, in the area of Workforce, which was the highest valued of all seven areas, Ohio ranks 41<sup>st</sup> in the nation. Workforce shortage is such a contemporary crisis that, on any given day, you are bound to run across a story about how this shortage is impacting us at a national, state, and local level. We all have personally experienced this when we see missing items on store shelves, have difficulty finding a craftsman to do work at our house, wait for extended periods of time to be seated in a restaurant that is only half full and, especially related to this committee, a teacher shortage that is nothing short of a crisis. The lack of a workforce impacts every single sector of our economy. Now, all careers are high growth, high demand. The amendments that will be proposed will allow us to offer more industry credentialing training programs across new employment sectors, including Child Development Associate to help staff our nurseries and day care centers operate effectively (they are also at a critical shortage). Expansion of Career Tech programs will increase options for Opportunity Youth to re-engage in their education and pursue their dreams and desires for a quality life after high school.

They will also ensure that industry credentialing and training is done "in-house" and not outsourced to other agencies. We know that this model works best – when you can develop the positive rapport needed with youth so as to support their learning while mitigating barriers to education and workforce. At Oakmont, we do not shy away from the performance objectives that quantify and validate our Career Tech approach. In fact, during the last two years – and during the global pandemic – our youth earned nearly 6,000 nationally recognized industry credentials and a placement rate of 74%. Given our nearly 1,400 graduates during that time, that means over 1,000 young men and women entered Ohio's workforce.

Lastly, these do not take away, detract, or infringe upon the wonderful work being done at the many Career Tech Centers across Ohio. These changes simply give those youth who have dropped out of high school an improved chance for a life with purpose, passion, and possibility. A chance to re-engage, for their own future, that will also help Ohio grow. As the old saying goes, "Let a 1,000 flowers bloom".

Sincerely,



Dr. Jerry Farley  
VP – Career Tech  
Oakmont Education