

May 1, 2023

Senate Education Committee

Ohio Statehouse
1 Capital Square
Columbus, OH 43215

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and other distinguished members of the Senate:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 33 requesting the Senate Education 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.

My name is Bethany Rachel, and I am a Program Manager for Junior Achievement of North Central Ohio. A little over a year ago, I left the classroom after 13 years in education to become a program manager for 7 of the 16 counties that Junior Achievement of North Central Ohio encompasses. While I was teaching, I knew that teaching littles came with great reward. You get hugs and high fives, you see them learn how to write their name, and watch them develop a love for learning. When I stepped away from the classroom to become a Program Manager for Junior Achievement, I worried that I would not be able to make as big of an impact on our students as I had when I was teaching within the classroom. I quickly realized that I was wrong. I realized that there was a greater impact to be made.

Being a mom of three and seeing my oldest struggle after graduation to enter the workforce and college environment was difficult. I quickly realized that no one had ever exposed her to the options that were available to her after graduation other than military or higher education. She also quickly realized after being on campus for a short amount of time that it was not for her. She came back home and began her future as an entrepreneur. As I encouraged her to chase her dream of being a business owner, I realized that she is one of many who has never been encouraged to chase career dreams.

I am lucky enough to go into schools every day to help educators and students explore the three pillars of JA: Career readiness, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship. Working with students to help them be prepared to begin a career, understand the options available to them and having the financial understanding to chase their dreams, isn't an elective class that is available to every student. In fact, when I sit in administration meetings and explain my passion to Superintendents, Principals and Teachers I am oftentimes met with this statement, "This is exactly what our students need but we just do not have the extra staff or funding to implement this." They are ecstatic when I explain to them that that is exactly what Junior Achievement does. To create events like our Inspire to Hire that will give their students the knowledge on soft skills that they will need to obtain a job, to expose their students to 50 plus local businesses, and then provide follow-up with students to give them opportunities for internships or job shadowing. We really focus on giving all the tools that the students need to be successful.

I recently found myself in Belleville Ohio on a Saturday morning with a student who wanted to chase her dream. She had shared with me in class that she wanted to be an agricultural engineer one day but that that would only fuel her passion and dream to restore cars. I told her that I would love to introduce her to an old friend of mine who builds hot rods and is known globally for his work. It was on that cold Saturday morning, a small business owner made this young girl's dream a reality. He offered her an on-the-spot apprenticeship and she's been working in his shop on Saturday mornings since then. It is stories like this that are reminders to me of the great work Junior Achievement does.

As great as that Saturday morning experience was for me and that student, it is disheartening to know that the majority of our student population has not had this experience due to the lack of funding and manpower. I know that our schools are stretched thin, but without closing the gap between the classroom and the workforce we will continue to see the struggles of employment in our communities.

With your support, we will be able to see a continued impact on our communities. Our small towns will continue to see passionate entrepreneurs like my daughter. Our companies will continually be introduced to passionate young people looking for a dream career. And more than that, our communities will continue to thrive with the growth of our students seeing the amazing opportunities that we have to offer them here at home.

Sincerely,

Bethany Rachel

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Bethany Rachel".

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