

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.

I am a current classroom volunteer and member of the board of directors of Junior Achievement of North Central Ohio, but more importantly, I'm a product of the organization. It's in this role that I, Katie Tolin, ask for your support of H.B. 33 for the Financial Literacy and Workforce Readiness Programming Initiative.

How many people can truly pinpoint a time in their lives that made them who they are today? For me it's easy. It's those years in high school I spent learning entrepreneurship and financial literacy as part of my Junior Achievement experience. It instilled my love of business and entrepreneurship, and I'm proud that I was able to take the jump from employee to business owner seven years ago. Lessons learned during that influential time in my life, both positive and negative, helped me first build a successful business career and then gave me the knowledge and courage to start a small business where I now help other small businesses grow profitably.

My story with JA doesn't stop there. I can share with you many instances of students I've been able to influence as a JA classroom volunteer, but let me start with one I'm most touched by still to this day. There was a shy and quiet young woman who was part of a Success Skills class I taught early in my volunteering experience. She took every word I said to heart. She asked me to review her resume to make sure it met what I taught her. She wrote out answers to every single sample interview question I provided her and asked for my feedback to improve her answers. She wore an outfit to class one day to ask me if I thought it was interview appropriate. Then, one day, she came up to me after class to tell me she applied for an entry-level position at the company I worked with at that time, and she had an interview. We spent time talking about that interview and what she needed to be prepared for. I was able to go back to the company's HR team and tell them how impressive of a candidate I thought she was. HR agreed, even commenting on how prepared and professional this high school senior was for her job interview. The day she told me that she accepted that job offer from my employer, I barely made it to my car before the first tear dropped. She worked so hard for it and deserved that job; an after-school job that ultimately shaped her lifelong career choice. She had her JA moment and I was so lucky to witness it.

I am just one of 7,500 engaged JA volunteers. I have volunteered for nearly 25 years and ultimately joined the board 15 years ago. I stopped counting the hours I've given to this organization long ago because it's not about the time, it's about the difference we are making in the financial futures – the lives – of kids. Over the years I have watched this organization grow. We serve more students in more communities across Ohio, but there are more kids out there, especially in our rural areas, that need our help.



As chair of the Junior Achievement of North Central Ohio scholarship/grant committee, I recently read more than 50 applications and interviewed eight candidates on the impact JA had on them. For the first time, we're awarding scholarship dollars to help someone start down a career path that does not require a traditional 4-year college degree. A young man from the Mansfield area shared how attending JA's Inspire event, which introduces high school students to different career options, led him to settle on firefighting as a career. He talked to three different fire departments on that JA Inspire day, and then researched what training was needed and how much it would cost him. JA led him to the career he's now going to pursue. And hopefully, as a JA alumnus, he's among the 60% that have found their dream job.

With college enrollment declining over the past decade according to the National Center for Education Statistics, we need to do more to educate students and help them find career options that match their future educational desires, regardless of what they might be. But JA is in only 63% of Ohio school districts today. And much of that is centered in our larger cities, not rural areas. That needs to change. JA needs your help to reach more students across the state. To help expand their career options. To improve their financial savvy. To help them achieve their goals.

The benefits to the State are sizeable when we have more productive citizens among us who are running businesses, creating jobs, paying taxes, and spending, saving and investing wisely. JA is uniquely positioned to help schools teach these much-needed skills and introduce students to careers right here in Ohio that they never considered. With 87% of JA alumni, myself included, saying that JA contributed to their personal development, your investment will produce a high return.

Please support the H.B. 33 budget request to build upon the great results JA produces today and help us expand our reach. Together, we can help students prepare to join Ohio's workforce. What is good for one is good for all.

Sincerely,

Katharine (Katie) A. Tolin

Katharine A. Tolin

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