

Testimony in Support of H.B. 432 - Career-Technical Workforce Development Educator License

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and other honorable members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Stephanie Jolliff, and I submit this testimony in support of H.B. 432 on behalf of the Ohio Association of Agricultural Educators, OAAE. OAAE is a professional organization dedicated to promoting excellence in agricultural education, and we support this bill because it expands access to licensure and alternative preparation programs, addressing the critical shortage of qualified teachers in agricultural education programs. We support this bill because it proposes significant reforms to the issuance of career-technical workforce development educator licenses in our state. As an educator deeply invested in career-technical education, we believe these changes are necessary and crucial for addressing the persistent shortage of highly qualified teachers in agricultural education and career-technical education programs.

Addressing the Shortage in CTE Teachers

Agricultural education and CTE programs play a vital role in preparing students for careers in the agriculture industry, yet they have long faced challenges in attracting and retaining qualified educators. The shortage of CTE and agricultural education teachers has been a chronic issue for decades, as highlighted by Smith et al. (2017). Across the nation in 2021 alone, alternative licensure new hires accounted for 38% of newly employed agricultural education teachers, indicating the magnitude of the shortage. The demand for CTE teachers continues to increase with program growth, expansion, retirements, and openings. In Ohio and across the country, we need alternatively certified teachers to fill teaching positions and educate our students. Without these alternatively certified teachers, programs will be limited for expansion, less students will be served, and open positions may remain unfilled.

Importance of Effective Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

Effective teacher preparation and purposeful professional development programming are critical factors in addressing teacher retention, as Solomonson et al. (2018) identified. CTE teachers face rapid curriculum design changes, agricultural technology advancements, and evolving educational practices. To address these challenges, targeted teacher professional development programs tailored to the needs of Career Technical Education and CTE teachers are imperative.

One alternatively certified teacher from southern Ohio emphasized the importance of proximity to employment when considering enrollment in alternative educator preparation programs. They shared, "Having to commute once a week to Columbus was incredibly challenging, particularly when balancing teaching responsibilities. Depending on traffic, spending 3-4 hours on the road

each night was strenuous. While online classes were an option, I preferred face-to-face instruction."

Research has consistently shown that when teachers are involved in planning their professional development and are supported by a mentor, the alternatively certified teachers feel a greater sense of ownership and are more likely to engage actively in the learning process. Continuous professional development with a mentor is essential for enhancing teacher competence and retention within the agricultural education and CTE profession.

Supporting H.B. 432: Enhancing Career-Technical Educator Licensure

H.B. 432 introduces significant changes to career-technical educator licensure, allowing individuals to directly apply for an initial license and access alternative educator preparation programs. These reforms address the needs of SBAE programs by offering flexibility and options for prospective teachers, thereby expanding the pool of qualified candidates. During an interview with one of our OAAE members, an alternatively certified teacher with a major in agricultural leadership and a master's in community engagement, they expressed, "I opted for the alternative certification route because I am passionate about teaching agricultural education. However, the process was delayed as I awaited approval from a school board. Once hired, balancing teaching during the day with pursuing my alternative teaching degree at night has been like running a marathon—I am exhausted." This sentiment underscores how the change in the licensure system would positively impact prospective teachers like our OAAE members, providing them with a smoother pathway to pursue their passion for teaching agricultural education.

Creating alternative programs and issuing two-year technical educator licenses demonstrates a commitment to addressing the shortage of SBAE teachers and promoting their professional growth. By facilitating access to licensure and supporting ongoing professional development, H.B. 432 will contribute to the strength and sustainability of SBAE programs across our state.

As a recent doctoral degree recipient and having completed a dissertation focused on *Illuminating Pathways: A Qualitative Exploration of Resources and Support Requirements for Alternatively Certified SBAE Teachers in Ohio*, my research reinforces the necessity of this bill in providing essential resources and support for alternatively certified teachers in agricultural education. I appreciate your dedication to our students and your support of the future of alternatively certified educators, who should have a streamlined, supported journey toward excellence in CTE and agricultural education.

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On behalf of OAAE, I urge the esteemed members of the Senate to support H.B. 432 and its provisions for enhancing career-technical educator licensure. By addressing the shortage of SBAE teachers and prioritizing effective teacher preparation and professional development, we can ensure that our students have access to high-quality agricultural education programs that prepare them for success in the workforce.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,
Stephanie Jolliff