



May 3, 2023

Senate Finance Committee

Ohio Statehouse
1 Capital Square
Columbus, OH 43215

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, Senator Brenner, and other distinguished members of the Senate:

Thank you, Chair Dolan and distinguished members of the Ohio Senate for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 33, requesting a \$3 million appropriation in the FY 24-25 Ohio operating budget to expand Junior Achievement's workforce development, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship programming to Ohio's students.

My name is Al DiFranco, and I serve as the President and CEO of Junior Achievement of Greater Cleveland, which serves Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, and Lorain Counties. Before joining JA five years ago, I served as a JA volunteer and saw first-hand the positive impact our programming can have on a young person.

Junior Achievement's value proposition is unique and our work is more critical than ever. As we continue to experience what many in the educational space are calling "COVID hangover," students are in need of life skill development and positive adult influences. Employers are struggling to fill basic job needs because they don't have enough applicants, or their applicants do not have a baseline of soft skills needed to begin their career. JA is working as a solution provider, both in raising awareness of these opportunities for students and preparing them for the working world.

JA provides curriculum that meets state standards, but just as important as the curriculum itself is the delivery method of our curriculum. JA lessons are delivered by business and community leaders in classrooms all over the world. This gives students a real-world professional who comes into their classroom to help them learn about someone's career journey. We call this "Aspirational Leadership," and JA's national research shows that more than one-third of JA students go on to pursue a career in a similar field as their JA volunteer. Students don't know about opportunities until they can see them, hear about them, experience them. JA program experiences help students envision what is possible.

This funding would allow JA to provide programs and experiential learning activities to students in more of our urban and rural communities where financial resources are often lacking, but where the need is high. JA does not charge school districts, schools, teachers, or students for the programming we provide. We raise funds from the business and foundation communities where we serve our students. While Ohio is one of the most philanthropic states in our country, we do not have a large number of new companies or organizations moving into the state lining up to provide new funding for nonprofit organizations. This is where we need public support, so we can expand our programming for students in the communities we serve and make sure all of Ohio's students are given the opportunity to reach their personal and professional potential.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony, and for your support of education in our state! All the best,

Al DiFranco

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Al DiFranco".

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