

May 24, 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:

My name is Lori McCleese and since 2019, I have served as the President of Junior Achievement of North Central Ohio which encompasses sixteen Ohio counties. My foray into nonprofit leadership is a second career, as I spent my 20's and 30's working in senior leadership positions for several Ohio banks. I have always been passionate about education, mentorship, and youth development and Junior Achievement has been the most rewarding position I have ever held.

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

At JA of North Central Ohio, we work with over 200 business and organizational partners, all of which share one common challenge: filling their open positions. We also work with over 100 school districts who *also* have shared challenges; fulfilling all that is required of them from an academic and testing perspective, negotiating contracts, dealing with parents, and navigating the largest youth mental health crisis in our lifetime.

In our discussions with both schools and businesses, it is abundantly clear that putting the responsibility of workforce development on our schools is simply not working. Like all other employers in the state – they are facing teacher shortages, bus driver shortages, and everything in between. In the past few weeks alone, because of the work we are doing in our communities, we have had two schools and a community organization ask if JA would be able to take on the career coaching function in area high schools.

JA's flagship career exploration program, JA Inspire is being recognized across the country as a game changer in youth talent pipeline development. Over the past three years we have engaged tens of thousands of Ohio middle and high school students in our JA Inspire events which showcase thousands of careers at hundreds of employers in our state. We are highly focused on Ohio's in demand jobs, and have built strong partnerships with post-secondary institutions, trade organizations and the entrepreneurship ecosystem. This Spring we held Inspire in Stark County, Wayne County and Richland County, and currently we are being asked by workforce boards to add events in Ashland County and Marion County.

Junior Achievement does not just showcase careers.

- We teach students the soft skills needed to be successful in work and life.
- We connect students with job shadow opportunities, internships, and apprenticeships.
- Our content aligns at every grade level with the career connections framework as established by the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation, Ohio Means Jobs, The Ohio Department of Higher Education and the Ohio Department of Education.

- We are working with school partners across the state to help them meet the new full semester financial literacy mandate with our JA course that meets every standard in the state model curriculum. We continue to update the curriculum to include newly added requirements including how to complete the fasfa, which is included in HB33 line 34,460 and the incorporation of free market capitalism content as proposed in SB17.
- We have nationally recognized entrepreneurship programs...and much more.
- And we are entirely privately funded.

JA of North Central Ohio, JA of Greater Cleveland and JA of Mahoning Valley collectively raise \$3 million each year from the business and foundation communities in our 24 counties. With that \$3 million, we reach nearly 55,000 students each year which amounts to less than \$100 per student. 55,000 students is approximately 10% of the students in our counties. We need your help to do more, not only in our metro areas, but also in our rural communities where the financial resources are inadequate to support the work that is ***so desperately needed***.

In 2021 The Ohio Farm Bureau Foundation awarded its first ever \$100,000 youth pathways grant to Junior Achievement to help expose students to careers in agriculture and environmental science. Recently, an Akron Public Schools teacher shared how happy she was to see agriculture represented at our Inspire event because she has students interested in that career pathway and they do not work with any agriculture companies.

In closing, Junior Achievement is a conduit between Ohio's students and the business community. We are doing the work everyone is talking about but are severely limited because of financial resources. Giving one more thing for our schools to do is not the answer, even if the funding follows. One of my favorite quotes is *"If you want to see different results, do things differently."* We are asking you to do things differently and let us show you the results.

With sincere appreciation.

Lori McCleese



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