



***BEFORE THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
INTERESTED PARTY TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 33***

Chairman Dolan, Vice-Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 33 (HB 33). My name is Bill Watson and I am the Superintendent of Utica Shale Academy.

Utica Shale Academy is a dropout prevention and recovery school located in Columbiana County that aims to help at-risk students graduate from high school and enter the workforce with an employable skill. We are unique amongst our peers because we are the only dropout prevention and recovery school that focuses on career-technical education. This focus allows students to utilize the Ohio Department of Education's industry credential and workforce readiness alternative pathway to graduate from high school rather than the traditional graduation requirements.

At Utica Shale Academy we serve 23 school districts across eastern Ohio and as a result we spend more than \$6,000 on a per pupil basis for out of county transportation services. In fact, for some students, we spend more transportation the student than we do educating them. Additionally, this exorbitantly high expenditure limits our ability to build new workforce training programs for students and hire more instructors.

With this backdrop, it is important to highlight that Utica Shale Academy was one of only a handful of schools that lost revenue due to the adoption of the fair school funding formula. Prior to the adoption of the fair school funding formula, Utica Shale Academy received approximately \$1.6 million in state funding each year, but the school's state funding decreased to \$1.2 million after the formula was applied. We are still reviewing how this current budget will impact our state funding, but we remain concerned we will have to shoulder a greater percentage of per pupil funding costs than other schools.

The Ohio Senate can support Utica Shale Academy's mission of helping at-risk students enter the workforce with an employable skill and a high school degree, by supporting Senator Rulli's omnibus budget amendment. Under the amendment \$350,000 each fiscal year is set aside from the Ohio Department of Education's pupil transportation line item for Utica Shale Academy. To assure the appropriation addresses the transportation issues we face, the amendment specifies the funding must only be used to cover the cost of student transportation needs.

Adopting the amendment will allow Utica Shale Academy to divert current transportation funding to other purposes that will provide greater benefits to our students. Like many career-technical education centers, Utica Shale Academy must place students on waitlists because current programs are at their capacity. We also need to purchase equipment to develop new programs, but often cannot afford the necessary machinery to adopt a new program.

The legislature's investments in facility and equipment funding for career-technical education will help address those needs, but Senator Rulli's amendment will bolster those efforts.

In closing, we ask you support Senator Rulli's omnibus amendment to allocate \$350,000 to Utica Shale Academy because its inclusion in HB 33 will help build eastern Ohio's next generation of workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I welcome any questions from the committee.