

MAHONING COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL MAHONING VALLEY COMMUNITY SCHOOL



Jennifer B. Merritt, Superintendent

**HB 33 Interested Party Testimony
Senate Health Committee
May 9, 2023
Mahoning Valley Community School
Jennifer Merritt, Superintendent**

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today as an interested party on HB 33, Ohio's biennial operating budget. My name is Jennifer Merritt, and I am the Superintendent of the Mahoning Valley Community School.

Mahoning Valley Community School ("MVCS") is a dropout prevention and recovery school operating under a Community Learning Center model serving students from 16 different school districts within Mahoning, Trumbull and Columbiana Counties. Students that attend MVCS have either been expelled from or otherwise are unable to attend their home school district and are at least one grade level behind their cohort. The majority of the students at the school are Youngstown City residents and are one of the most underserved populations in the region.

As a Community Learning Center model, the school serves as the connection between the school and community and provides a variety on resources on-site that help improve access and reduce barriers to academics. Specifically, mental health providers, a health clinic, community partners, a workforce development center, and a childcare facility are all available at the Community Learning Center to connect students and their families to valuable resources needed to ensure successful outcomes for students. This model is also grounded in research to be effective at reducing youth violence in the communities that they serve.

Last biennium, MVCS received a TANF earmark of \$425,000 per fiscal year in the operating budget and we are pleased to report this has allowed us to add a parent liaison who connects our families to resources and monitors progress and outcomes for students, implemented an after-school program that provides industry credentials and credit recovery opportunities to students as well as engages youth in structured activities that promote social-emotional wellness and student safety. We are asking for your support in retaining a reauthorization of this earmark as well as a slight increase to \$500,000 per fiscal year. This increase would enable MVCS to expand the hours of the after-school program and add staffing to ensure that the students have a safe and structured place to be that provides academic support and access to resources that they need in order to be successful.

This support will help ensure more TANF-eligible students who attend our school have the tools they need to be successful. Through connecting more students to these valuable resources and ensuring that all students leave the school with workforce credentials or enrolled in college, we will significantly improve outcomes for the youth and their families and improve life in the community overall.

Chairman Huffman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify as an interested party on HB 33. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.