



Lyle Huffman, Executive Vice President of Government Affairs & Community Impact

Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber

Proponent Testimony – House Bill 2

To Chairman White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and the Children & Human Services Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 2 (HB 2). My name is Lyle Huffman, and I am the Executive Vice President of Government Affairs & Community Impact for the Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber (YWRC).

On behalf of the Regional Chamber's Government Affairs Council and our entire Board of Directors, I would like to present our proponent letter to HB 2.

The YWRC is the third largest metro chamber of commerce in the Great State of Ohio, with nearly 3,000 member organizations representing more than 150,000 employees in and around the Mahoning Valley. Our mission is "To provide the economic development, advocacy and business services to promote the growth of our members and Valley." Our vision is "To be a catalyst for economic success, creating a prosperous Valley that is the preferred community in which to live, learn, work, and play."

In our efforts to meet our mission and vision statements, we partnered with Youngstown Area Goodwill Industries in 2024 to conduct a Community Needs Assessment to determine the challenges facing workforce development in the Mahoning Valley. The goal of the needs assessment was to collectively understand the barriers to employment in our region and fix them, thereby assisting both job seekers and business operators/owners. Surveys and focus groups were utilized throughout the research timeline, and we were able to identify the largest barriers to workforce participation in our region. They include transportation, childcare, mental health, drug test/substance abuse, and housing. Not only has access to childcare remained a barrier to entry, but it also leaves large groups of individuals participating in the workforce significantly cost-burdened or turning toward family members for support during work.

The Mahoning Valley has a labor participation rate that lags 6% behind the state and national averages. That 6% represents 20,000 people in the Youngstown-Warren MSA, and we are actively working to bring these individuals into the workforce. Due to ranking No. 2 on our Community Needs Assessment, childcare has become one of our priorities within our 2025-2026 Public Policy Agenda. As the Mahoning Valley seeks to close the gap in our labor participation rate, reducing childcare costs, improving work-life balance and helping employers retain employees is crucial.



HB 2 is a welcome solution to this problem and introduces the tri-share cost model to the State of Ohio after it has seen success in other states such as Michigan and Kentucky. HB 2 alleviates the cost burden from employees by bringing the State and the employer to the table. We support the language within the proposed legislation that allows for an employer to contribute "some or all of the employee's share." This provides an opportunity for employers who participate in the program to offer more coverage of the employees' share to help with retention. A healthy work-life balance is a critical factor if a legal guardian is to work while caring for a child.

The Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber strongly supports House Bill 2 because we recognize and advocate in favor of legislation that we see as positively impacting business. HB 2 does this by removing barriers from Ohioans looking to enter the workforce. Finally, we support HB 2 because it meets our mission, "To provide economic development, advocacy and business services to promote the growth of our members and Valley" and our vision, "To be a catalyst for economic success, creating a prosperous Valley that is the preferred community in which to live, learn, work, and play."

Thank you for your time and consideration of our position. I would happily respond to any questions you may have in writing or in-person.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lydia B. Thomas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.