



**Interested Party Testimony- House Development Committee
HB 96 — FY26-27 State Operating Budget
February 26, 2025**

Chairman Hoops, Vice Chair Lorenz, Ranking Member Abdullahi and members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 96 — in support of Baldwin Wallace University's funding request of \$2.5.M over the biennium through the Department of Development's Local Development Projects line — to expand the NEOFIX program to support drone infrastructure for safety and community development to initial partner communities throughout Ohio by creating the Ohio Community Drone Infrastructure Program.

My name is Howard Thompson, I am the Project Management Liaison for Manufacturing Works. Manufacturing Works serves Northern Ohio as a non-profit, regional economic development agency focused on industry outreach, supply chain, technology alignment, strategic planning, and workforce development (specifically apprenticeship, mentorship, leadership, and youth development). Our leadership is guided by a Board of Directors comprised of the businesses we serve and the regional institutions we support.

With the passage of HB77 in December 2024, Ohio now officially has its own rules for drones, allowing the state to charge those who operate drones recklessly, interfere with first responder activities, or commit other safety violations. The Ohio Community Drone Infrastructure Program leverages a successful program in Northeast Ohio that demonstrates affordable drone infrastructure for Ohio. In the context of HB77, the program supports better awareness for private and commercial drone pilots and provides Ohio public safety entities with better awareness of what's flying over Ohio communities. With increasing drone flights, there's a growing risk of serious issues, including crashes and drones being used for illegal activities, making it important for law enforcement to have these tools.

But with safety and clarity also come opportunities for Ohio's communities. This infrastructure also enables programs such as **1) "Drone-as-a-First Responder"** which allows police and fire to extend the capacity of scarce resources, reduce unnecessary dispatch, and de-escalate responses; **2) emergency medical delivery which** has the potential to save hundreds of Ohio lives and many millions of Medicaid dollars each year; and **3) commercial drone delivery services** (including medical) which will create new services for Ohio residents and hundreds of new high-tech jobs for our high school graduates.

The strategic roadmap created by Manufacturing Works and the Northern Ohio Governance Advisory Network has been designed to serve as a regional template adaptable anywhere across Ohio. As the first step in the roadmap, NEOFIX exemplifies that this model aligns with the state's DriveOhio July 2022 AAM Framework and can contribute to success for the entire State of Ohio.

An important lesson of our roadmap development has been understanding that we must include both private and public stakeholders in the process. Just over a week ago we held an Aerospace and Advanced Air Mobility Supplier Summit where we brought together industry such as Parker Aerospace, Skypro (which is a drone manufacturer), Ohio Homeland Security, Lorain County Community College, Cleveland State University to identify how we work together to advance AAM business development initiatives. We have substantial experience with this process in Northeast Ohio and are excited to support the State of Ohio by bringing our expertise to anywhere in the state where it is needed.

I respectfully request your support of Baldwin Wallace University's budget request so we can make Ohio a leading state in AAM.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity. I will now take any questions you may have.

Howard Thompson
Director of Business Development
Manufacturing Works