

**Ohio House Education Committee
Testimony on House Bill 96 (State Operating Budget)**

**Proposed Ohio Facilities Construction Commission (OFCC) Study on
Career-Technical Education (CTE) School Facilities**

**Testimony of Scott Wludyga
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Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the Ohio House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission and its allocations to career-tech school facilities. My name is Scott Wludyga and I am the superintendent at the Ashtabula County Technical & Career Center. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of our district and the Ohio Association of Career-Technical Superintendents (OACTS), as well as the Ohio Association for Career-Technical Education (Ohio ACTE).

It is an incredibly exciting and unique time for the career-technical education (CTE) community. As the committee is likely aware, our schools are operating amid an unprecedented demand for CTE programming, which has recently prompted a call within the DeWine Administration and Ohio General Assembly to expand our school facilities. Thankfully, this call was in part answered during the last State Operating Budget (HB 33) with \$200 million devoted to growing our buildings and overall presence. We are incredibly grateful for these dollars, which have delivered building improvement projects across 35 school districts, expanding our reach across 29 counties.

Unfortunately, 24 career-technical schools applied and did not secure funding for their expansion goals given budget limitations. Many of those applicants still have shovel-ready construction projects that may never commence due to financial constraints. Given that the one-time funding from the last cycle is going away, we wanted to share and explain our budget recommendation to create a legislative study committee to gather the necessary data and examine the need for a sustained funding model for our career-tech facilities moving forward.

Our recommendation stems from unique issues that have historically prevented our Joint Vocational School Districts (JVSDs) and other Comprehensive and Compact career-tech schools from benefiting from the traditional OFCC process. First, the OFCC leverages a “next-in-line” system where the state’s 650+ school districts (including CTE programs) must wait until they are up next in sequential order to receive funding. Second, even if “next on the list,” the OFCC employs a formula much like the k-12 school funding model that requires schools to fund their

own “local share” of the construction project. And therein lies the third, potentially most significant issue: career-technical schools’ renovation/expansion endeavors cost double, triple (or more) than a traditional school district; our facilities require more space, more expensive equipment, and usually a unique structure (comparatively). Hence why so many career-tech schools have been unable to meet the “local match” and pass millions of dollars in levies necessary to fund our building improvement projects. Over the last decade, only three JVSDs have been able to leverage OFCC funds through its customary system.

Our campus was built in 1969, over 50 years ago, during a time when Ohio was pioneering the establishment of a system of JVSDs across the state. At A-Tech, our mission remains to cultivate a dynamic workforce for Ohio's future. To achieve this, we must provide facilities that support meaningful learning experiences for every student. Unfortunately, many of our career centers are still aging, and the space considered adequate in the 1960s is insufficient for today's educational needs.

While the OFCC is committed to collaborating with our career-tech schools and supporting program expansion, the funding process has limitations in flexibility and hasn't kept pace with the demands of modern training. Some of our programs and schools still face a lack of space, students on waiting lists, and CTE labs that are not equipped with the necessary modern tools and supplies.

About 15 years ago, our district here at A-Tech attempted to use the OFCC process to expand our facilities. To receive the funding, we needed to pass a large levy. The levy did not pass. Our campus did not expand, and students remained on waiting lists each subsequent year. There are many examples like this. The current system is a game we can't win, and it is holding us back.

As mentioned, over the last several years the Administration and legislature saw the need to expand schools like ours and have strongly encouraged growth—including injecting \$200 million into CTE Facility Expansion during the last budget. A-Tech received about \$6 million, and we are in the process of adding three new labs that will expand opportunities for nearly 90 more students next school year.

While that will have a big impact in our region, not all career-tech schools received this one-time funding. Our Associations recognize that another \$200 million request for career-tech building expansion in this particular budget bill may well be unrealistic. Hence why we are proposing a study committee to scrutinize the data and create a sustainable funding model for our facility needs moving forward. Maybe it's a dollar amount; maybe it's updating the model to mandating more CTE schools each year; maybe it's allowing funding for more projects—whatever the possible options, we need a study committee to plan and develop a system, because

the current OFCC funding process for JVSD, Comprehensive, and Compact Career-Technical Schools is not sufficient to meet the state's evolving workforce demands.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective. I would be happy to answer any questions.