House Education Committee
Interested Party Testimony on HB 96
Renee Coley, Computer Science Teachers Association

Thank you, Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the committee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of the Ohio Computer Science Advocacy Coalition's budget priorities, 1) adopting a computer science graduation requirement, 2) appropriating $500k for the CS District Playbook, and 3) adding an extension of the computer science teacher licensure waiver to the budget. I will be focusing my testimony on the third request.

My name is Renee Coley, and I am a Computer Science Teacher for 6th and 7th graders at Waggoner Road Junior High in Reynoldsburg, Ohio. I also collaborate with the Ohio STEM Learning Network and Code.org to train educators across Ohio in integrating Computer Science into K-12 education. I am here to urge you to add an extension of the computer science teacher licensure waiver to the budget, and express support for the Governor's $8 million proposed renewal of the Teach CS program to train computer science teachers.

As a 33-year veteran of public education, I never imagined I would teach Computer Science. Until nine years ago, my passion was Language Arts, but the class of 2016-2017 changed my career trajectory. One day, during an indoor recess in the computer lab, my class stumbled upon an activity called "Hour of Code" from Code.org. This fun, interactive experience not only captivated my students, but sparked their curiosity and creativity. Soon, they were asking to "do Code.org" during free time and even wanted to stay in during recess to continue coding. I realized then that there was something about this content that was different.

Around that time, Code.org was looking for teachers to pilot a new middle school curriculum. I eagerly applied and was fortunate to be selected as one of thirty-five teachers nationwide. This experience led me to become a facilitator for Code.org, training other educators on how to introduce Computer Science to their students. I speak to you today, not just for the students of Ohio, but because of them.

I carry a quote with me from Josh Caldwell's book, "Creative Coding," that serves as the basis for why I feel so strongly about Computer Science Education: "Students without basic computer science education will be excluded from jobs, and the ability to understand the technological components of society will define the 'haves' and 'have-nots' of the future." I want to emphasize that the future is now. In 2023, Ohio

averaged 13,722 open computing jobs each month, with an average salary of $96,393. Beyond specific computing jobs, basic computer science knowledge is essential for navigating modern life, from everyday technology use to understanding the vulnerabilities that come with it. Our students must be equipped to thrive in this world.

However, we face a significant challenge. As of May 2024, Ohio has just over 3,000 licensed Computer Science teachers, compared to 5,109 licensed Physical Education teachers. This disparity highlights the urgent need for training and support for potential Computer Science educators. The TeachCS grants, technically under ODHE's budget, but worth mentioning as part of this conversation, are a step in the right direction, aiming to add another 650 Computer Science teachers in the 2024-2025 school year. Yet, to sustain this growth, we also need time.

The Licensure Waiver has been renewed for a two-year period in each of the last few biennial budgets, and we are hoping the Legislature will once again support this renewal. The Waiver allows teachers not yet licensed in computer science to teach computer science courses so long as they have attended professional development for those courses. This program has enabled universities and organizations like the Ohio STEM Learning Network to create programs that encourage teachers to transition into Computer Science, just as I did. Since 2017, I've facilitated training for over 300 Ohio teachers, and the number one need I've identified for those embarking on this journey is time. Time to explore programs through universities such as Cleveland State University and organizations like the Ohio STEM Learning Network. Time to collaborate with fellow teachers, mastering not only Computer Science concepts but also effective teaching methodologies. Time to work with mentor teachers and build the confidence necessary to pass the Computer Science 054 exam.

Extending the Licensure Waiver will provide Ohio teachers with the essential time they need to prepare and deliver high-quality Computer Science experiences to our students. To give schools more certainty than they've had in the past with just two-year extensions, we are asking that the Legislature extend the waiver through 2032.

Thank you for your attention, and I urge you to support this critical initiative.