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State Representative Joshua E. Williams Ohio House of Representatives

Chairwoman Fowler Arthur, Vice-Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson, and esteemed members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on HB 119, the Graduation Readiness and Development (GRAD) Act.

For decades, a four-year college education has been the traditional path for many students. However, with the rising cost of tuition, many students have looked for other options. The problem lies in the fact that many of these options aren't well advertised, and students aren't aware of them. As a non-traditional student myself, I have first-hand experience with this issue. Had all my options been accessible to me at a young age, I may have chosen a different path

That is why Representative Santucci and I have introduced the GRAD Act. Under this legislation, the Department of Education and Workforce must formulate an exit orientation program for eleventh and twelfth grade students, to be administered by their school or school district. More extensive than typical career fairs, this program will guide students to resources for education, employment, and general life skills. These resources include:

- Federal student loan packages and federal/state grant programs for higher education
- Local internships and apprenticeships

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- Free IMAP(Individual Microcredential Assistance Program) training
- Technical and vocational education opportunities
- Voter registration resources
- Military enlistment options
- Local job openings through OhioMeansJobs and ODJFS
- Access to local healthcare and STD testing facilities

Additionally, this legislation requires each local workforce development board and OhioMeansJobs center to collaborate with the school or district in planning these events. By ensuring local participation and feedback, these programs will be tailored to specific local labor markets and will help students find the most accessible and convenient opportunities, while helping fill gaps in that area's workforce.

By diversifying and illuminating the options available to these students, we can help them make informed decisions about their future. When students feel pressured into following a traditional educational path even though it may not align with their skills, interests, or financial resources, they can end up with large amounts of debt and an unfulfilling career. We have the ability to change this pathway by making sure all juniors and seniors are ready for their own post-graduation life, and not a predetermined course. The GRAD

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Act will expand opportunities, increase awareness, and set our students up for success in whatever direction they choose.

Chairwoman Fowler Arthur, Vice-Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Education Committee, thank you again for the chance to provide sponsor testimony on HB 119. I welcome any questions you may have.