



**Proponent Testimony on House Bill 125**

**House Education Committee**

**Tuesday, May 6, 2025**

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College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences**

Good morning, Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Education Committee. My name is Megan Arnold, and I serve as Co-Director of Operations in Ohio State University Extension, within the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES).

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 125, which would require school districts to grant excused absences to students in grades K-12 for participation in scheduled 4-H and FFA programs and activities. I offer this testimony on behalf of CFAES, OSU Extension, and Ohio 4-H.

Ohio 4-H is part of the nation's largest youth development organization, empowering nearly six million young people across the U.S. with the skills they need to lead for a lifetime. While 4-H is now active in all 50 states and more than 80 countries, it was first organized in 1902 in Clark County, Ohio, by A.B. Graham, making our state the proud birthplace of the 4-H. Over a century later, 4-H in Ohio remains a vital part of OSU Extension, within the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences at The Ohio State University.

In 2024, more than 167,000 youth were involved in Ohio 4-H clubs, camps, schools, and after-school programs. These programs are supported by nearly 14,000 adult volunteers who serve as mentors and educators. Today, Ohio 4-H prepares youth not only in agriculture and natural resources but also in STEM, leadership, and career readiness—equipping them to contribute meaningfully to Ohio's communities and economy.

A highlight for many 4-H youth is the opportunity to exhibit their projects at county fairs projects that range from showing livestock to creative writing to STEM projects like robotics. Many of these events occur after the start of the school year, with nearly half of Ohio's county



and independent fairs taking place between mid-August and early October. Without a clear policy, students who miss school to participate in these educational activities may be penalized.

House Bill 125 addresses this challenge by ensuring that students are not academically disadvantaged for participating in meaningful, scheduled 4-H or FFA activities. Under the bill, students would be excused from school when written documentation is submitted to the principal or attendance officer by a 4-H or FFA educator, and they would be allowed to make up missed coursework without penalty. The bill also contains appropriate guardrails, preventing absences during state assessments or periods of disciplinary action.

While we strongly support the intent of HB 125, we respectfully suggest that the bill allow some flexibility in the method of verifying student participation by placing the primary responsibility for absence notification on the student and their parent or guardian. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the bill sponsors and this committee on potential alternative options for verifying 4-H activities.

At its core, 4-H is about growing responsible, engaged young people who are ready to contribute to their communities. House Bill 125 supports that mission. It tells our youth that their hard work matters and that the State of Ohio values what they're learning outside the classroom just as much as what they're learning inside it.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I'd be happy to answer any questions.