

Written Testimony for House Bill 125

Thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony for House Bill 125. My name is Kelsea Jenkins, a proud resident of Brimfield, Ohio, and a 4-H and FFA Alumni. As a young beginning farmer who served as treasurer of the Portage Steakmakers 4-H club and student advisor of the Southeast FFA chapter, earned both my State and American FFA Degrees, and graduated from Ohio State University Agricultural Technical Institute and Main Campus OSU with a degree in Agribusiness & Applied Economics and dual minors in Agricultural Communication and Production Agriculture, I am testifying on behalf of myself to share how this bill will positively impact Ohio's youth. HB 125 ensures excused absences for participation in 4-H and FFA activities, such as the Ohio Cattlemen's BEST show circuit and county fairs, without academic penalties, supporting the next generation of farmers like me.

As a student at Lake Center Christian School in Hartville for elementary and middle school, I missed an entire week of school each year because the Portage County Randolph Fair coincided with the school's start date. Some teachers made catching up intentionally difficult, creating academic stress for my 4-H commitments. In high school, I continued my involvement with the Portage Steakmakers 4-H club and Southeast FFA chapter, competing in the Ohio Cattlemen's BEST show circuit, including the Ohio Beef Expo, and participating in the Portage County Randolph Fair. I also balanced membership in the International Thespian Society, engaging in theater. These experiences, alongside my leadership roles, honed my skills in responsibility and agricultural innovation. However, conflicts arose. My drama instructor, upset due to my theater involvement, became hostile when I prioritized the BEST show circuit over a school play, despite my repeated explanations of my 4-H and FFA obligations. Her refusal to accommodate my absence nearly cost me my graduation cords, adding undue stress.

These challenges reflect a broader issue—many students face barriers when pursuing agricultural activities that school policies inconsistently recognize. House Bill 125 addresses this by requiring school districts to grant excused absences for scheduled 4-H and FFA activities for students in grades K-12, allowing them to make up missed schoolwork without adversely affecting their grades. This provision would have alleviated the struggles I faced in both middle and high school, enabling students to engage in transformative programs like the BEST circuit and the Portage County Randolph Fair without academic repercussions. As a former officer, I saw how these programs foster leadership and prepare youth for agricultural careers. Serving as treasurer for Portage Steakmakers and student advisor for Southeast FFA taught me accountability and teamwork, skills I leveraged in my OSU studies and now apply as a farmer raising cattle and growing corn and soybeans with my husband and parents in Portage County.

HB 125's requirement for written documentation from a 4-H or FFA educator ensures accountability, while its restrictions—prohibiting absences during state assessments or disciplinary periods—are fair. By passing this bill, Ohio will empower students to explore agriculture without choosing between education and passion, supporting rural communities like Portage County and cultivating future farmers, agribusiness professionals, and civic leaders.

I urge the committee to support House Bill 125 to provide equitable opportunities for Ohio's 4-H and FFA youth. Thank you for considering my testimony and for your commitment to our students and agricultural future. I am available to answer questions or provide further insights.

Sincerely,

Kelsea Jenkins