



**BEFORE THE FINANCE COMMITTEE
THE OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
REPRESENTATIVE BRIAN STEWART, CHAIR**

HOUSE BILL 96

TESTIMONY OF

PAUL ROBINSON, PIONEER CLADDING & GLAZING SYSTEMS

GEOFF LIPNEVICIUS, THE LINCOLN ELECTRIC COMPANY

TRACI SPENCER, TECHSOLVE

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Chairman Stewart, Vice Chairman Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify before you today in support of House Bill 96. My name is Paul Robinson and I am the CEO at Pioneer Cladding & Glazing Systems.

Pioneer is an exterior façade contractor and manufacturer specializing in custom unitized curtainwall. Headquartered in Mason, Ohio, we have a strong presence across the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic. We operate as an ESOP with approximately 400 employees, over half of whom are based in Ohio. It is a pleasure to be here today with you to talk about Ohio's manufacturing industry.

I am testifying today on behalf of my company and on behalf of The Ohio Manufacturers' Association (OMA) to voice our support for critically important workforce provisions contained in the state operating budget proposal.

In recent years, Ohio manufacturers and their partners have devoted tremendous resources to modernize workforce development. From establishing a statewide system of industry-led sector partnerships, to advocating for improved training and funding, to promoting "earn-and-learn" models, manufacturers have transformed the way that the Buckeye State is forging the next generation of manufacturing talent. However, there is still work to be done and the DeWine administration has proposed a budget that will make significant investments into our state's workforce.

A program that is currently included in the budget is the state's continued investment into Industry Sector Partnership grants through the Ohio Department of Development. These grants enable manufacturers within a regional labor market to work together to influence alignment around common solutions with education and training, economic and workforce development, and community organizations. It is important to maintain the funding proposed in House Bill 96 so that manufacturers at the local level are able to influence training programs, maximize resources and services, and create a pipeline of future workers. Industry Sector Partnerships are a proven workforce development strategy that puts employers in the driver's seat and have demonstrated effectiveness in the state to help manufacturers expand regional talent strategies.

Another program supported by the OMA in the budget is continued funding for the TechCred program. As the manufacturing industry continues to see improvements in modernization, it is critical that employers have resources available to help their employees gain technology-focused credentials. This program is used by many manufacturers across the state to help employers upskill their employees, ensuring that in-demand jobs are able to be filled by workers who have gained the necessary credentials.

There are other provisions to applaud as well contained in the budget proposal: the elimination of the current waiver allowing school districts to opt out of teaching career technical education in middle school, which will expand middle school career technical

education access to over 200 additional school districts. To complement this, the budget also proposes funding to establish regional tech prep centers focused on increasing access to career technical education.

While there are plenty of worthwhile investments currently included in House Bill 96, we believe that there are additional opportunities to explore to help continue to grow the state's workforce and ensure that demand is being met. The importance of building the manufacturing workforce has never been greater. Ohio manufacturers have been operating in a talent shortage for years. This gap is particularly demonstrated in entry-level operator and technician roles. As of 2024, Ohio has 30,000+ annual technician postings each year and produces about 1,200 related associate degrees annually. A stronger pipeline must be created into the technician pathway outside of the typical higher education two-year degree.

The OMA has been utilizing WorkAdvance as a proven, employer-driven workforce solution that targets untapped and underutilized talent – including underemployed Ohioans, transitioning workers, and returning citizens – and provides high-quality, industry-aligned training. The program includes career readiness (soft skills) and math essentials as well as coaching to support retention and advancement for up to 12 months after placement. WorkAdvance positions Ohio with a pipeline of operators right now who are primed to become technicians through career growth and continued education.

We have seen success with this program as a proven workforce training model. Since 2022, the program has trained 1,554 Ohioans (100% credential attainment), and placed 1,132 workers in manufacturing jobs (73% completion-to-placement rate).

WorkAdvance has demonstrated success, and now is the time to take the program to scale to allow access to many more prospective workers across the state. With a requested funding amount of \$6.2 million per fiscal year, the investment will allow for the expansion and scaling up of WorkAdvance statewide to increase program access resulting in 1,000 new placements in quality manufacturing jobs. It will reduce per-participant costs by scaling across multiple Industry Sector Partnerships (ISPs), and integrate WorkAdvance into Ohio's long-term workforce funding models (WIOA, state workforce grants, private partnerships) for sustainability.

We have included the amendment for WorkAdvance in our testimony today for your review and ask for your support.

I will now turn it over to our next manufacturer to describe the second program we see value in the state investing in.

My name is Geoff Lipnevicius and I am the Senior Manager, Organizational Effectiveness at The Lincoln Electric Company and the Chair of The Ohio Manufacturers' Association's Workforce Leadership Committee. Lincoln Electric has five locations in Ohio and 3,000 employees. We are actively involved with three Industry Sector Partnerships—Workforce

Connect in Cuyahoga County, Alliance for Working Together, or AWT, in Lake County, and AMIP in the Cincinnati region. We are highly committed to collaborating with our peer manufacturers and public partners to increase awareness about manufacturing careers with young people and career switchers, and I'm pleased to be here today.

Much of the future of Ohio's manufacturing workforce is currently in middle school and high school classrooms. However, outdated perceptions of manufacturing persist, discouraging students and parents from considering the high-tech, high-wage careers our industry offers.

To combat this, the OMA has implemented a strategy leveraging MakingOhio, which is the OMA's outward-facing brand and voice to promote Ohio manufacturing careers. Through a dedicated MakingOhio.com website and social media platforms, relevant content and downloadable tools are published for consumption and use by manufacturers, ISPs and adult influencers of K-12 students (parents, educators, etc.); all designed to raise awareness and improve perceptions of manufacturing careers. Examples include engaging career fair handouts, manufacturing-themed activity sheets, presentations for classroom visits, occupation "hot cards" promoting the most in-demand careers, planning guides for participating in Manufacturing Day and Summer Camps, and much more.

Funding through the operating budget will help further strengthen industry awareness by creating the Manufacturing Career Ambassador Program. This disciplined operating system will allow manufacturers to engage with local schools to help students get on career pathways that lead to post-graduate education or good jobs in support of Ohio's Career Connections Framework. Key components of the program will include training manufacturers to engage students, parents and educators through the perspectives of today's manufacturing workforce, as well as connecting manufacturers directly with schools for hands-on career exploration,

Another critical part of this program is enhanced digital presence promoting career pathways by leveraging the already-in-place MakingOhio brand and website to become the state's youth outreach voice. This will showcasing career opportunity similarities across manufacturing sectors, proven by the Manufacturing Competency Model.

The funding request for the Manufacturing Career Ambassador Program and the expansion of the MakingOhio brand is \$3.35 million per fiscal year. This investment from the state would expose K-12 students to manufacturing career awareness programming, strengthen Industry Sector Partnerships (ISPs) with ready-to-use recruiting tools, and expand access to modernized career education materials, ensuring students see the full scope of opportunities in Ohio manufacturing.

While Ohio is on a path to driving change in the long term, a short-term accelerant is what will be needed to ensure that the work gets moving now. If not, state leaders will find that a talent shortage will impact both Ohio's ability to win economic development projects and nationally, American aspirations for onshoring of critical manufacturing operations.

Through the funding of WorkAdvance and MakingOhio, we will collectively close Ohio's manufacturing workforce gap with proven, scalable models, equip manufacturers to recruit and train a future-ready workforce, and ensure Ohio remains a national leader in advanced manufacturing.

We have included the Career Ambassador amendment in our testimony for your review and ask for your support.

I will now turn it over to our last panelist here today to discuss the final program we are hoping to see funded in the operating budget.

My name is Traci Spencer and I am representing TechSolve as a proud partner of the Ohio Manufacturers Association. As a designated regional partner of the Ohio Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP), TechSolve is deeply embedded in the fabric of our community, serving companies across Ohio's southwest region.

MEPs help Ohio's small and medium-sized manufacturers to increase sales, create jobs and generate cost savings through technological innovation, workforce training and improved management practices.

Small and medium-sized manufacturing companies are critical to Ohio, representing 90% of job growth for high-paying jobs. For every new manufacturing job that is created or retained, three to five supporting jobs are also created. This is why investing in this space is so important to Ohio's future.

We ask that the House include the Manufacturing Technology Assistance Program (MTAP) into the budget, to provide an opportunity for manufacturers with under 500 employees to apply for \$150,000 in grant funding for equipment upgrades and smart technology integration. With an initial funding allocation of \$12,000,000, this program will not only enable manufacturers to thrive in today's dynamic business environment but also maintain Ohio's position as a frontrunner in manufacturing technologies.

MTAP represents a crucial opportunity to empower Ohio's small to mid-size manufacturers to thrive in an increasingly competitive global market. By providing grants for the adoption and integration of smart technologies, this program will not only drive operational improvements but also ensure the long-term sustainability of our manufacturing sector.

Through collaboration with Manufacturing Extension Partnerships (MEPs) like ours in Southwest Ohio, MTAP will offer manufacturers access to expert guidance, further bolstering their ability to navigate the complexities of technology integration.

Drawing inspiration from successful initiatives in neighboring states like Iowa and Indiana, MTAP has the potential to catalyze transformative growth and innovation across Ohio's

manufacturing landscape. We urge your support for this proposal, recognizing its significance in driving economic competitiveness, fostering innovation, and ensuring the continued success of Ohio's largest industry - manufacturing.

This program was previously introduced as House Bill 435, which received multiple hearings before the House Finance Committee and has recently been reintroduced as House Bill 159, sponsored by Representatives Nick Santucci and Steve Demetriou. We are grateful for their leadership and support on this important initiative.

We are happy to answer questions you might have about our testimony. We also have Jessica Borza and James Lee from the OMA available, should you have technical questions about these programs.

We thank the committee for its time, its thoughtful deliberation of these issues and your continued support of Ohio's manufacturers.