House Finance Committee
Interested Party Testimony on HB 96
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Thank you, Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, 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 $300k for the CS District Playbook, 3) adding an extension of the computer science teacher licensure waiver to the budget, and 4) continuing funding for Teach CS. I will focus my testimony on the fourth request.

I stand before you today not just for the students of Ohio, but because of them. As a 33-year veteran of public education, I never imagined I would teach Computer Science. My passion was Language Arts—until nine years ago, when a day called "Hour of Code" changed the course of my career. This fun and interactive experience was an instant hit with my sixth-grade students. They were engaged and eager to keep learning. Soon, they were asking to stay in for recess to "do code." I realized then that this content was different. It made kids hungry to learn.

Josh Caldwell, in his book *Creative Coding*, put it best: *"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."* The future is now. In 2023, Ohio averaged 13,722 open computing jobs each month, with an average salary of $96,393. Yet, many of our students lack access to foundational Computer Science education, particularly in rural and underserved communities. If we do not act now to continue investing in teacher capacity, we are setting our students up to be left behind in an increasingly digital world.

The Teach CS program has been instrumental in changing this reality, but its success hinges on continued funding. Our teachers are our number one resource in expanding Computer Science education, and without proper training and support, we cannot equip students with the skills they need now for the future.

- Teach CS funding has significantly increased access to Computer Science education, especially in underserved and rural communities. Without continued investment, we risk leaving thousands of students without opportunities to learn these essential skills.
- This funding is directly responsible for training educators through professional learning and licensure programs. Many of these teachers would not have had the chance to bring Computer Science into their classrooms without this support.

Cutting funding now would mean losing momentum and reducing the number of qualified teachers available to expand CS education.
- The program is building long-term capacity in schools by ensuring teachers have the knowledge, skills, and resources to sustain Computer Science programs. Without ongoing investment, schools risk losing the ability to maintain and grow their CS offerings.
- Expanding Computer Science education is critical to Ohio's workforce goals, providing students with essential computational thinking and problem-solving skills. If we fail to continue funding for Teach CS, we risk leaving our students unprepared for the job market and widening the gap between those who have access to these opportunities and those who do not.

The impact of Teach CS is undeniable. The Ohio STEM Learning Network, only 1 out of 17 Teach CS providers, had the following impact:

- In the 2024-2025 school year, 70 educators in 63 schools are reaching 62,681 students.
- For 2025-2026, the Exam Prep Program alone includes 60 educators in 58 schools, impacting approximately 17,500 students. We expect 150+ educators across multiple programs, including a new professional learning pilot in Gallia County.
- Teachers from Northwest and Southeast Ohio have joined our CS programs in significant numbers, demonstrating strong interest and need in rural areas.
- Teach CS has helped grow a community of CS educators who now mentor others, ensuring sustainable progress.

If the $8 million in Teach CS funding is approved, we will:

- Expand teacher training to ensure more educators can confidently teach Computer Science.
- Increase student access by growing the number of schools offering Computer Science, particularly in underserved areas.
- Strengthen industry connections to align education with workforce needs and create pathways to high-demand careers.

I have seen firsthand how Computer Science changes lives. It empowers students, fuels their creativity, and prepares them for the jobs of today and tomorrow. Investing in Teach CS is an investment in Ohio's future workforce, economy, and most importantly, our students.

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