



National Inventors Hall of Fame®

House Finance Committee Hearing on HB 96 (State Operating Budget)

Testimony of Sophia Johnson, Associate Director, Government Relations National Inventors Hall of Fame April 2, 2025

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on House Bill 96 today. My name is Sophia Johnson, and I am the Associate Director of Government Relations at the National Inventors Hall of Fame in North Canton, Ohio.

For over 50 years, the National Inventors Hall of Fame has been at the forefront of illuminating the legacies of world-changing inventors and preparing the next generation of scientists, inventors and scholars. We partner with the United States Patent and Trademark Office to honor our Hall of Fame Inductees whose inventions have made a positive impact on the world and to provide youth with creative, hands-on learning experiences through summer, in-school and afterschool STEM programming.

Camp Invention is our flagship summer program. It launched 35 years ago and has since grown its national reach to impact over 120,000 students in grades K-6 last year alone. This includes over 14,000 young Ohioans from 146 schools or districts across 39 counties in the Buckeye State.

The STEM curriculum for Camp Invention aligns with Ohio's science learning standards, and there is data showing a single week at Camp Invention can improve students' math and reading test scores, school attendance and college aspirations. Facilitated by local Ohio educators, the program not only provides teachers with valuable professional development opportunities but also fosters a supportive learning environment where students engage with challenges and develop the resilience, creativity and problem-solving skills needed to become future innovators and entrepreneurs.

Since 2022, the National Inventors Hall of Fame has received funding from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce's Summer Learning and Afterschool Opportunities Grant. We understand DEW developed this grant in part by leveraging post-COVID federal dollars received via the American Rescue Plan Act (also known as the ARPA—ESSER Fund). The National Inventors Hall of Fame used this grant funding to expand the number of students who have access to Camp Invention. In fact, our nonprofit reached 843 students in 20 different school districts in 2024 thanks to the state's support.

Unfortunately, we might not be able to maintain this broader reach (predominantly within low-income communities) given that the federal funding has dried up and DEW did not propose



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the grant's continuation in the state's Operating Budget bill (HB 96). Without replacement funding to fill this gap, it will become more challenging for Camp Invention to continue offering its robust STEM programming to as many students and school districts in future years.

To ensure Camp Invention can maintain its current impact on local communities and their access to elementary school STEM education, the National Inventors Hall of Fame has proposed that the legislature set aside \$500,000 in each fiscal year to support our enrollment growth at Camp Invention. Specifically, we ask for these funds to help support our ability to enroll more low-income students in our successful STEM-focused education programs.

The state's support of Camp Invention in fiscal years 2026 and 2027 will also enable the expansion of Camp Invention in new school districts statewide, which in turn will result in more students having the ability to spend a week embracing our hands-on curriculum, which is backed by over 25 years of evaluation data. Additionally, by focusing the state's appropriation on helping enroll more low-income students, the legislature can help increase access to STEM curricula for families and students who otherwise would be unable to participate.

We thank DEW and the legislature for its support over the past several years, and once again, on behalf of our organization and the students and families we serve, we urge your continued support in this State Operating Budget bill. Our modest request will help give hundreds of young Ohioans access to high-quality summer camp programming that can kick-start their interest in STEM — while also leading them toward a successful career.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I welcome any questions from the committee.