



Majority Whip Nick Santucci

House Finance Committee

Sponsor Testimony for House Bill 98

June 3, 2025

Chairman Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and Members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 98, to establish the Community Connectors Workforce Program.

The Community Connectors Workforce Program will support students as they prepare to join the workforce. The purpose of the program is to identify available jobs and to prepare students to help employers fill their workforce needs. Through this process, businesses and other employers will be connected to students so they can gain professional work experience. This program will involve collaboration with local OhioMeansJobs centers and community partners to fill available jobs, internships, and apprenticeships while complying with applicable minor laws prescribed under section 4109.02 of the Revised Code.

Society has seen consistent and increasing patterns of young adults struggling to find employment. Between 1989 and 2024, the labor force participation rate for young adults in the U.S. aged 16-24 decreased 17%.¹ This program encourages young adults to work: the Department of Education and Workforce will oversee the program, and each educational service center (ESC) will administer the program for the school districts with which they have entered into a contract under section 3313.843 of the Revised Code. This legislation also requires that ESCs hire or contract with individuals to serve as directors in high schools throughout Ohio to provide support.

Workforce preparedness is an essential quality for students following their graduation from high school, and soft skills have been identified as an important area of improvement for students entering the workforce for the first time. In 2024, 69% of U.S. executives indicated that they planned to prioritize hiring candidates with soft skills.² This program will support students by creating an emphasis on soft skill training, better preparing them to succeed over the course of their professional career.

The legislation allocates \$8 million each fiscal year for this program. In each year, one half of the funding will be allocated equally among ESCs, to ensure that each ESC has an adequate amount of funding to employ or contract with a director and administer the program. The remaining half of the funding will be allocated to each ESC in proportion to their student count.

I introduced this bill in the last General Assembly, and it was unanimously voted out of both the Finance and Primary and Secondary Education Committees. It did not receive any opponent testimony in either committee, and was supported by multiple ESCs. This General Assembly, it was once again unanimously

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Youth labor force participation rate at 60.4 percent in July 2024," <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2024/youth-labor-force-participation-rate-at-60-4-percent-in-july-2024.htm#:~:text=The%20youth%20labor%20force%E2%80%949416,77.5%20percent%20in%20July%201989.>

² LinkedIn, "October 2024 Global Talent Trends: Data-driven insights into the changing world of work," [https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/global-talent-trends.](https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/global-talent-trends)

voted out of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee with no opponent testimony and significant support.

Chairman Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and Members of the House Finance Committee, thank you again for giving me the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 98. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.