

44th House District

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State Representative Joshua E. Williams
Ohio House of Representatives

Chairman Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and fellow members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on House Bill 216.

In my region of Northwest Ohio, whenever I meet with business owners I hear a common refrain: “Where can I find more employees? I’ve met personally with many employers who would love to expand their operations but are unable to. These businesses are not just unable to find skilled employees but are often unable to find any employees to hire. Many of these businesses offer competitive wages, apprenticeship programs and benefits, but are still unable to attract recruits. This isn’t a problem unique to Northwest Ohio either – it’s an issue statewide.

In late 2023, the Dayton Daily News reported that Ohio had twice as many job openings as unemployed people. However, our state may have an untapped reserve of employees: those who are receiving public benefits from the state and are avoiding employment, so they don’t lose that income. As a disabled ex-railroad worker, I experienced this conundrum firsthand. After years of painful and debilitating spinal surgery, I finally felt able to enter the workforce. However, due to my disability, physical labor was out of the question. I needed an education and job training to become a

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productive member of society. I expected that the Bureau of Worker's Compensation would be eager to point me to the training and education I needed to get off public assistance and contribute to the economy of our state. I could not have been more surprised to learn that if I enrolled at the University of Toledo, my benefits would be terminated immediately. Instead of accepting a life of unemployment and public benefits, I had to battle with the state bureaucracy to receive a waiver to get retrained and get back to work. The fact that I had to work so relentlessly to be given the opportunity to get back to work is evidence of the twisted incentives of our unemployment system.

Rather than encouraging people to return to work, our current system incentivizes life-long dependency. A HAND UP offers us the chance to reset these incentives and encourage a smooth off-ramp into the workforce for those dependent on public benefits. I want to give credit to my colleague Rep. Jarrells, for the development of this comprehensive and fiscally conservative legislation. Through an extension of benefits that cover childcare and healthcare, accessible education and mentorship programs for applicants seeking employment, this bill stands to save the state money in the long run by getting Ohioans back to work. Chairman Young, Vice-Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 216. I welcome any questions you may have.