

Transfr Testimony: Ohio FY26-27 Budget Amendment

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of the proposed budget amendment of \$1.3 million in annual investment for implementation of interactive career awareness, exploration, and assessment tools through the Department of Education and Workforce.

My name is Dan Risko, and I serve as the Vice President of Government Relations and Funding for Transfr Inc. I'm a native of Northeast Ohio and reside here in Columbus now; I am also an alumni of state government, so I thank you for your hard work during this stretch of budget season. Transfr is a workforce development company specializing in immersive career exploration and job training tools that prepare learners of all ages for in-demand, high paying careers. Transfr's virtual reality (VR) platform and web-based tools are used across the nation to help students discover, explore, and prepare for their future in a way that is both engaging and effective. We work with partners in a variety of industries including K-12 education, higher education, nonprofits, private industry, corrections, and state and local government.

Ohio's commitment to the whole child - demonstrated through its ongoing efforts to improve graduation rates, reduce absenteeism, and support student achievement - has set the stage for meaningful investment in college and career readiness. With data from Ohio Excels showing over 100,000 job openings in Ohio that pay more than \$50,000 annually, this funding is critical to ensuring students are prepared to take advantage of these opportunities.

The proposed funding would support tools like Transfr Trek, which aligns directly with Ohio's Career Connections Framework and provides immersive, standards-aligned career exploration to middle and early high school students.

Transfr Trek empowers students in grades 6 and up to:

- Discover over 100 high-growth industries across all 16 national career clusters through an engaging, gamified mobile and web-based platform.
- Participate in "day-in-the-life" virtual simulations of in demand jobs in sectors such as healthcare, advanced manufacturing, broadband, and skilled trades.
- Set personalized goals, review local wage and employment data, and build a pathway aligned to their interests and Ohio's workforce needs.

We've seen measurable results: in efficacy studies, 77% of students reported increased engagement with Transfr's simulations compared to traditional classroom methods, and 90% felt more confident in their understanding of careers after using the tools. Transfr's content focuses on in-demand careers that pay a living wage: manufacturing, construction, healthcare, broadband and many more. Transfr's mission is to help an individual get onto a career path and secure a good paying job, often in industries that don't require a four year degree. And while we are supportive of the college pathway, it is no secret that today that it is not for everyone. New innovative tools are needed to show young people the good paying careers that exist in our state, while also providing them the information they need on how to get there.

Through the immersive Transfr Trek platform, young people can learn about a job from their tablet or computer: how much it pays; where you can go locally to obtain the training or education needed for that job;

and then actually try it out in virtual reality, where our hands-on experiences allow a user to try a career. Imagine being 14 and climbing a broadband tower during 3rd period class; assisting with a knee surgery; or manufacturing an EV battery. These are all experiences that Transfr Trek offers.

Nearly 60 partners across the great state of Ohio are using our platform, delivering over 51,000 simulations to over 20,000 users, creating real economic impact through improved student outcomes and workforce alignment. Our existing education partnerships include Columbus City Schools, Dayton Public Schools, Educational Service Center of Eastern Ohio, and more. Outside of our K-12 partners, Transfr is working with other organizations to innovate their own career exploration and workforce training programs, including:

- OhioMeansJobs locations
- Ohio Boys and Girls Club Alliance
- Ohio Broadband & 5G Sector Partnership
- Ohio Department of Youth Services

And yet, we know challenges remain. According to Ohio Excels, 65% of Ohio adults believe that students are either not ready for or unsure of their career prospects. Meanwhile, 68% of parents say their children would be more likely to participate in career technical education opportunities if programs were offered in their school. This funding would support expanded in-school use and extend career exploration to ensure that students and families alike can access training, resources, and meaningful career pathways regardless of zip code. The time to act is now, and the proposed investment will catalyze this transformation.

Transfr has been operating a similar program in the state of Florida since last year. Since the Florida Virtual Reality Workforce Development Program launched last fall, 1,247 unique users have explored 4,366 careers through virtual reality simulations; and 57 unique users have completed 297 intensive job training simulations in virtual reality. And while the purpose of the program here in Ohio would primarily target middle school career exploration, the applications for future expansion into virtual job training are readily available.

We respectfully urge the committee to support the amendment. Ohio's students deserve the tools and experiences that prepare them not only to dream big, but to make informed, confident steps toward fulfilling careers.

With that, I thank you for your leadership, for your consideration, and for your time.