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**Public Testimony of Kyle Wilkinson
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Online School)
OH HB 96, FY26-27 State Biennium Budget
Senate Education Committee**

Presented by Kyle Wilkinson on behalf of the Ohio Online Learning Coalition

Date: May 14., 2025

Good Afternoon Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Kyle Wilkinson, I am the Director of Academics at the Ohio Virtual Academy, and I am here representing the Ohio Online Learning Coalition and the Ohio Virtual Academy. Today I would like to focus on the critical role that online community schools like OHVA can play in expanding Career and Technical Education (CTE) opportunities across our state.

Introduction to Ohio Virtual Academy (OHVA)

Ohio Virtual Academy (OHVA) is a virtual school option serving students in all 88 counties of Ohio. We have been dedicated to inspiring and empowering students through a tailored educational experience for the past 24 years. As the 7th largest district in the state, OHVA currently enrolls over 16,000 students, including almost 3,000 special education students.

Scope of OHVA's CTE Programming

Ohio Virtual Academy (OHVA) has been providing Career Technical Education for 7 years. This year, we are offering 10 pathways in 8 career fields, including Information Technology, Engineering, Business, Finance, Agriculture, Education, Health Science, and Arts and Communication. We plan to expand to 12 pathways in 9 career fields next year while still providing additional career exploration programs to over 4000 students in grades 7-10.

OHVA appreciates that the state has recognized the importance of preparing students for their future careers. There is an opportunity for online schools to play a pivotal role in driving job & career readiness within education.

CTE Model

The current CTE model in Ohio is based on legislation from 1968, which provided for vocational education for 11th and 12th graders. While the terminology has evolved, the structure has remained largely unchanged for over 50 years. The current model no longer meets the diverse needs of today's



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students, the demands of our modern workforce, or takes into consideration the large number of online students within Ohio.

Need for a Mindset Shift

To meet Ohio's growing industry and workforce needs, we must shift our mindset. The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (ODEW) has promoted CTE expansion and non-traditional implementation options, however there are still barriers preventing online schools from being able to fully provide these options to students.

Changing CTE Access Points

CTE is no longer limited to 11th and 12th graders or two-year programs. With the addition of Middle School CTE programming and early exploration in 9th and 10th grades, we need more flexible models. Traditional application and acceptance practices prevent equitable access for all students. Different students benefit from varying levels of CTE exposure, and our programs must adapt to these diverse needs.

Evolving CTE Delivery Options

Modern CTE delivery includes virtual education, simulations, online training, assessments, and virtual field trips. Integrated academics, middle school CTE, industry credential programs, and AI are now part of CTE. These advancements provide new opportunities for delivering high-quality CTE programs and align perfectly with the delivery of online schools.

Collaboration is the Key for CTE Expansion

To provide additional opportunities for Ohio students to access CTE, we need a comprehensive plan that involves collaboration among districts, support for program development, and adequate funding. There are many ways that CTE programming can help meet the state's workforce development needs, but it must begin with all stakeholders being open to new ways of implementing CTE within schools.

Solutions to the Barriers of Program Expansion: Capacity and Funding Flow

1. State-Wide Collaborative Model

- **Barrier:** Currently CTE funding for schools flows through the career technical planning districts they are assigned to. Often the CTPDs do not fully understand the unique needs of online students or know how to utilize the funding to support the online schools they partner with.
- **Solution:** As a solution, create a different flow of funding so that online schools can have access to the full resources needed to support their students in their CTE pathways and learning. This could include direct funding to the district or a more collaborative partnership/understanding from the CTPDs.

2. Leveraging Virtual Education



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- **Barrier:** Many traditional CTPD programs are currently at capacity, leading to students who are unable to participate in their desired CTE programs. This results in lost opportunities to train eager students for the workforce.
- **Solution:** Virtual education, such as that provided by OHVA, can be a flexible and cost-effective way to deliver high-quality CTE programs.
 - By utilizing online platforms, simulations, and virtual field trips, we can provide students with diverse and engaging CTE experiences that closely align with the new workforce development needs.
 - OHVA could offer CTE courses to students who are waitlisted in traditional CTPD programs and support other online districts who do not have the resources to fully implement their own CTE programming.

3. Supporting Students with Personalized Education Needs

- **Barrier:** Traditional CTPD programs often lack the flexibility to accommodate students with personalized education needs, such as those in credit recovery, students with special needs, or those with medical fragility, work, or childcare responsibilities.
- **Solution:** OHVA provides flexibility and has experience supporting students needing non-traditional schooling schedules and environments. By providing on and off ramps for these students to pursue their CTE experiences at OHVA, and appropriate access to funding, we can ensure that all students have access to the CTE opportunities they need.

Conclusion

In conclusion, expanding CTE opportunities in Ohio requires a shift in mindset, embracing new delivery methods, and fostering collaboration among districts. OHVA is uniquely positioned to help address capacity and expansion issues by providing flexible, high-quality CTE programs to students across the state. By working together, we can ensure that all students have access to the CTE opportunities they need to succeed in today's workforce.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Kyle Wilkinson
Director of Academics- Ohio Virtual Academy