



# Workforce Development Board Area 1

4057-A Gallia Pike  
Franklin Furnace, OH 45629  
(740) 259-6943

Crystal Keaton, Director  
Holly Johnson, Board Chair

[www.omjwda1.org](http://www.omjwda1.org)

May 22, 2025

## Ohio Senate Finance Committee

### Hearing on House Bill 96 (State Budget)

Chair Cirino, Vice-Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and esteemed members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee,

I am Crystal Keaton, the Director of Workforce Development Board Area 1, serving Adams, Brown, Pike, and Scioto Counties. I am also a Co-Chair of the GRIT Project's Steering Committee and currently the project's subgrantee from the Ohio Department of Development. I am honored to present this testimony regarding the funding provisions in House Bill 96 related to the GRIT Project, also known as Growing Rural Independence Together—Through Jobs.

Workforce Development Board Area advocates for an increase in funding for the GRIT Project from the proposed \$12 Million over the bi-annual budget to \$23 Million over the bi-annual budget period. This increase will maintain the current funding levels of the project and ensures its continued impact and growth across rural-Ohio.

The GRIT Project focuses on empowering students and adults on the path to financial independence through meaningful employment in in-demand occupations. The project also provides businesses with the much-needed service of a skilled workforce and a proven path to employee retention.

### Examples of successful business services include:

- **Seal-Tite:** A Southwest Ohio manufacturer with 125 years in business became involved with the GRIT Project through the local manufacturing sector partnership—BESTOhio. The business identified two crucial issues: recruiting a skilled workforce and retaining their current and future workforce. Through this partnership, the GRIT Project was able to assess, career coach, and upskill 17 prospective recruits for Seal-Tite and other Highland County manufacturers. Seal-Tite hired 7 of those recruits and retained 100% of them to date. Before this partnership, Seal-Tite retained less than 50% of new hires, and some recruiting cohorts were less than 10%. Other recruits in this cohort were hired by Adient, Corvac, and Hood Packing.
- **General Mills—Wellston-Jackson Co. Facility:** One of the oldest and most trusted food companies, with products in 90% of American pantries, became involved with the GRIT Project through a BestOhio referral. The local facility faced recruitment challenges of a skilled workforce due to a demand increase for their products. Over 90 days, the GRIT Project developed and recruited a



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training program for new hires. During this time, General Mills met its hiring goal of 127 employees, who were skilled and suitable for their positions. These employees expressed interest in further incumbent worker trainings and on-the-job skill development to grow within the company.

The GRIT Project has significantly advanced in upskilling high school students, job seekers, and incumbent workers, but additional resources are vital to sustain and expand these efforts.

We are requesting this funding increase to address critical needs, such as teaching soft skills to new workforce entrants and upskilling students and adults with industry-recognized credentials, on-the-job training programs, and incumbent worker trainings. These efforts assist Ohioans in maintaining employment and achieving upward mobility in their careers while helping Ohio businesses meet their workforce needs and retain skilled employees. Without this support, the project risks reducing the number of Ohioans and Ohio businesses it can serve. In the current state budget cycle, we have served over 150 Ohio businesses, with projections to reach 175 businesses by June 30, 2025, and 400 businesses by June 30, 2027, if the project is fully funded.

In summary, allocating \$23 million over two years to the GRIT Project is a strategic decision that will yield long-term benefits for Ohio's economy and communities. This funding is crucial for Ohioans to create a path to financial independence through in-demand employment opportunities, benefiting Ohio businesses in meeting their skilled workforce needs.

Thank you for taking the time to review this request. I strongly encourage your support for the increased funding of the GRIT Project to secure a brighter future for our state. I appreciate your leadership and commitment to advancing Ohio's workforce and economic development efforts.

Sincerely,



Crystal Keaton, Director  
Workforce Development Board Area 1  
OhioMeansJobs Adams, Brown, Pike & Scioto Counties  
GRIT Project—Growing Rural Independence Together