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Albert (Al) DiFranco, President and CEO, Junior Achievement of Greater Cleveland

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony today.

I am requesting your support for the funding in HB 96 for Junior Achievement programming throughout the State of Ohio. This funding will expand JA's reach across the state to all 88 counties, providing students with critical resources to prepare them for the world of work. JA's programs play a key role in the youth workforce development ecosystem by raising awareness of career pathways with a focus on high-growth career areas like healthcare, computer/IT, finance, and manufacturing.

The funding in the House-approved budget encompasses six Junior Achievement regions in Ohio: North Central Ohio, Greater Cleveland, Central Ohio, Eastern Ohio, Northwestern Ohio, and OKI Partners, which serves Southwest and Western Ohio. Together, these organizations cover the entire state.

HB 96 allocates \$1.25 million per fiscal year, and we appreciate this investment. I want to express my gratitude to Vice Chair Chavez for proposing an amendment to increase the funding to \$2.75 million per fiscal year. This larger investment will have a significant impact, particularly in areas of the state where effective career programming is lacking. For more than 80 years, Junior Achievement has impacted millions of students from age 5 to 25 across Ohio through experiential programming. Through in-classroom programs like "JA It's My Future" that helps middle-school students learn the importance of their digital footprint and build a personal brand to experiential programs like "JA Stock Market Challenge" which helps high school students learn about investing wisely and work well in teams, we deliver student experiences through volunteers recruited from corporate and community partners in our respective regions. Leading companies that help my team serve thousands of young people annually in Northeast Ohio are from partners like Sherwin-Williams, EY, KeyBank, Nordson, and Citizens Bank. These volunteers deliver curriculum, but more than that they provide positive adult influences in our communities where that is often lacking. Additionally, the six JA areas submitted over 50 letters of support from our partners and volunteers, highlighting the collective commitment to our mission.

Throughout the state, JA delivers more than 164,000 student experiences annually with approximately 900,000 instructional hours spent working with students. Each year JA partners with hundreds of organizations that build a real-world connection to what they are learning in the classroom.

A recent IPSOS study reveals that over half of JA alumni credit the program with enhancing their work ethic (57%) and career choices (56%). JA alumni enjoy higher incomes, greater job satisfaction, and are more likely to start businesses and attain higher education than the general population. Ninety percent feel JA significantly boosted their confidence in achieving goals.

To create a world in which young people have the skillset and mindset to build thriving communities.

These findings suggest a thriving small business environment, financial stability for families, and a strengthened talent pipeline in Ohio, producing graduates equipped with essential workforce skills. My words come from the perspective of leading JA in Cleveland for the past three years, serving on the team for nearly eight years, but most importantly as a JA volunteer for nearly two decades myself. I am here on behalf of my Board of Directors, staff, and most importantly the students we serve. I am especially glad you will be able to hear directly from one of our great students who has participated in our Stock Market Challenge. We do what we do for people like Jack Keegan. I hope you will support our work so we can continue to help young people throughout our state – no matter the location, find their passions and prepare them to be our future leaders.

Thank you for your time today.

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