



Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony for proposed Amendment SCO521 to Substitute House Bill 96.

I am Michael Woytek, Executive Director for The Ohio Academy of Science.

Now more ever, Ohio's national and global competitiveness, will depend on building a skilled technical workforce that is not only resilient and adaptable, but also committed to developing the mindset for lifelong learning. Governor DeWine and this Legislature have provided for the future with strong economic development including projects being developed by Amgen, Amazon, Anduril, Intel, and LG/Honda to mention a few. The Ohio Academy of Science's STEM Research, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship programs create a much-needed STEM talent pipeline necessary to attract and retain employers like this in Ohio.

For six of the last ten years through multiple Governors and General Assemblies, you have funded the Ohio Academy of Science to build a culture of innovation that uses inquiry, technological design, and entrepreneurial action to create social and economic value. Further, OAS supports these programs with significant private funding, so we are not asking for an appropriation that funds our whole program, but rather to allow us to work to match public support with private dollars. This public/private partnership is a necessary formula to expand impact among all students throughout the state.

To be sure, OAS programs that include Science Day (1949) and Ohio STEP (2014) are programs of rigor, mastery, and deep learning. Students are required to ask or develop a testable question, solve a problem by developing a design statement from a conceptual idea, build a prototype solution, and/or understand how this research can be commercialized. The requirements are to develop a full written plan, along with graphs, figures, and references and then provide a visual and oral presentation before an industry professional for final judging and evaluation. Depending on the program, students are evaluated based upon depth of understanding, experimental or engineering design, communications, originality, or the likelihood of commercial success and viability.

These programs develop the durable skills needed to advance Ohio's technical workforce. They provide students with an authentic learning experience that is relevant to real world applications and a connection to industry that most schools and classrooms are unable to provide.

To reach independent student learners outside of the traditional classroom, the OAS has developed a strong digital platform that includes curricular resources, guidelines, and templates to complete projects. We have developed a pilot mentor program connecting industry practitioners with students. Our programs are accessible and student projects are on public display 24/7/365. More than 4,000 student projects have been archived. Please visit <https://partner.projectboard.world/oas> to view this incredible work.

For fiscal 2024 and 2025, while operating without support from the State of Ohio's Biennial Budget, the OAS received roughly 60 % of its \$450,000 operating revenue through direct sponsorship, donations, grants, and in-kind contributions with the remaining 40% coming from programming fees, grants, membership dues, and individual donations. I have included letters of support from key stakeholders as a part of my written testimony. Additionally, the OAS secured more than \$400,000 annually in sponsored student awards and scholarships from 90 different organizations. These awards are paid directly to the students from the sponsoring organization. As such, these scholarships are not included in the OAS' operating budget.

While we are incredibly proud of our good work, we do this with a staff of 2.5 full time employees and 2 seasonal employees to coordinate programs. Without your support, we will not be able to maintain this level programming depth or grow opportunities to develop higher order thinking.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to provide proponent testimony and I humbly request the inclusion of Amendment SCO521 as part of Substitute House Bill 96. This Amendment would use already allocated Lottery funds from ALI 200631 that support STEM and STEM Education in Ohio and allow these existing funds to be used to support The Ohio Academy of Sciences STEM Initiatives - Ohio STEP and Science Day Programs which actively advance STEM Education with over 120,000 participants from 2014-today. We are not requesting GRF or any new money, just existing Lottery funds already allocated to STEM initiatives.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Woytek
The Ohio Academy of Science
Executive Director