

Testimony Before the Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Presented by Caroline Casagrande
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Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the importance of implementing a modern workforce development system that connects students with career opportunities and ensures they are prepared to enter Ohio's workforce successfully. My name is Caroline Casagrande and I am the Executive Director of Federal and State Relations for Ed Tech.

In today's rapidly evolving job market, Ohio needs a system that allows students to directly engage with employers while still in school. A successful workforce platform should provide students with career guidance, resume-building tools, and job readiness resources, ensuring a seamless transition from education to employment.

A model for such a system can be found in platforms like Tallo, which has demonstrated success in other states, particularly in South Carolina. Tallo has connected over 130,000 students with career opportunities by building strong partnerships with the state and key employers. Companies such as Boeing, BMW, and Michelin have used Tallo to build their high school talent pipelines, providing students with exposure to real-world job opportunities. Ohio can look to this success as an example of how an integrated workforce system can effectively prepare students for in-demand careers.

Ohio is poised for significant economic expansion with the arrival of mega employers such as Intel, Honda-LG Energy Solution, and Ford's electric vehicle production. These companies will need a skilled workforce to fill thousands of positions, and a modern workforce system can help establish a sustainable talent pipeline to meet this demand. Beyond these large employers, secondary and tertiary suppliers will also require a steady stream of qualified workers, making a robust workforce system even more critical.

A critical feature of an effective workforce development system is its ability to integrate with existing state resources. In Ohio, potential integration opportunities include OhioMeansJobs Centers, which offer job matching and career exploration, as well as work-based learning programs supported by the Ohio Department of Education. Additionally, partnerships with organizations such as Youth Opportunities Unlimited (Y.O.U.) and OhioGuidestone's Workforce 360° programs would enhance career readiness and job access for students and young adults. A well-designed system should use location-based data to connect students with employers in their geographic regions, creating a more efficient and responsive talent pipeline.

Furthermore, a workforce system should be able to connect students with national programs that expand their career opportunities beyond the state. Tallo, for instance, collaborates with organizations like SkillsUSA, which operates in Ohio and nationwide. By

integrating students into national networks, a workforce system can provide them with broader career opportunities and industry connections that support long-term economic growth.

A workforce system must also be designed with students in mind, ensuring that it meets them where they are and speaks their career language. Platforms like Tallo have invested heavily in engineering to create a user-friendly experience that maximizes engagement and career preparation. Additionally, an effective system should have the capability to attract out-of-state talent by identifying students nationwide who are willing to relocate for job opportunities in Ohio, helping address workforce shortages and strengthening the state's economy.

From a financial perspective, investing in a comprehensive workforce development system is a cost-effective strategy with significant returns. Businesses benefit from access to a skilled talent pipeline, reducing hiring costs and improving workforce retention. Meanwhile, students gain the critical tools needed to succeed in their careers, ensuring Ohio's long-term economic stability.

Ultimately, establishing a robust workforce system is a strategic investment in Ohio's economic future. By learning from successful models such as Tallo, Ohio can implement a system that connects students with meaningful career opportunities, strengthens the workforce, and ensures the state remains a competitive and attractive place to live and work.

Thank you for your time and consideration.