



Senate Finance Committee
Sub. House Bill 96
Dorothy Moulthrop, Ph.D., Chief Executive Officer
Jemier Johnson, Alum
Open Doors Academy
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Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Substitute House Bill 96. My name is Dorothy Moulthrop, and I am the Chief Executive Officer of Open Doors Academy (ODA). ODA is an educational nonprofit that provides high quality afterschool programs, summer camps, and year-round family engagement programming to children and young adults across Northeast and Northwest Ohio. We will serve more than 1,850 youth and their families this school year.

ODA is a workforce solution for many families that cannot otherwise afford childcare before and after school or during the summer. What sets ODA apart from other out-of-school time providers is our understanding that youth are best positioned to learn when their basic needs are met, and they are interested in the instructional content. We partner with local food banks to ensure that children receive snacks, meals and, in some cases, a bag of groceries to take home. In addition to working with math and reading tutors, we collaborate with our local partners to find instructors and courses that are educational and fun, like our culinary programs in Sandusky and Mansfield.

A recent analysis of the impact of our program on scholars' grades at our programs in Mansfield, Lima, and Sandusky, and in Lorain County further demonstrates the success of this model. On average, 66% of our scholars improved their grades in English/Language and 64% of scholars improved their grades in Math from the first to third quarter of the 2022-2023 school year.

Our studies have also proven the effectiveness of ODA's programming model in fighting chronic absenteeism. During the 2023-24 school year, our scholars showed an improved school day attendance rate of up to 66%, and on average spend 10 days more in school than their peers.

While our name may suggest otherwise, ODA is not a school, and we do not receive per pupil funding. We have been fortunate to receive TANF earmarks in prior budgets, which has allowed us to expand from 14 sites in the 2019-2020 school year to 28 sites in eight school districts today. **We are very grateful to have been included in the House version of the budget at \$1.5 million each fiscal year for ODA programs, and ask that you increase this amount to \$3 million each year.** There is significant interest and demand for our programs, and state support is vital for our ability to continue to meet this need. Without the additional funds we will be forced to close seven of our programs.

Now I'd like to introduce you to one of our ODA alums, to share his story about how ODA programs have impacted his life.

Chair Cirino, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Jemier Johnson, and my experience with Open Doors Academy began in 2011, when my dad started bringing me to summer camp before I was even enrolled. I officially joined the high school program at Cleveland Heights.

I moved in with my dad when I was in 9th grade. At that time in my life, I was going through a lot of change. I wasn't seeing my mom much anymore, and some weekends I didn't get to see her at all. Being at ODA Monday through Friday gave me the support system I was missing. My mentor, Miss Gina, became that steady voice I needed.

She taught me a lot of lifelong lessons that I still carry with me. I struggled with maturity—like a lot of high schoolers. She really helped me grow. She taught me how to be a young man and how to be respectful and chivalrous. She showed me how to carry myself differently around all my peers. At Cleveland Heights, especially during that time, those were important lessons. Her presence and guidance really kept me on track.

Open Doors Academy also helped me come out of my shell, and at the start it felt like my only safe space. Being around kids who weren't afraid to be themselves, who didn't have to be athletes or popular helped me see I could be myself, too.

The idea of going to college was also something I hadn't embraced before my time in the program, but the college tours and guest speakers that were a part of the ODA curriculum got me thinking about the future. Originally, I thought I'd just finish high school and go straight into the workforce. But ODA gave me a different perspective. The program made me excited about applying to college and for scholarships. They planted that seed for me.

Now, I'm studying at Cleveland State University and back at Cleveland Heights High School mentoring students who are in the same position I was in. I mentor them, help them with school and college applications. One of the scholars in my program needed help picking a homecoming outfit—and I was there for him. It goes down to that level of care. That's exactly why I came back to ODA. I want my scholars to see someone like me—who's been through what they're going through—and know it's possible to come out on the other side.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.