



**Ohio Senate Finance Committee
State Operating Budget (HB 96)
May 28, 2025**

Testimony of Scott Wludyga, Superintendent, Ashtabula County Technical and Career Center

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. I am Scott Wludyga, Superintendent of Ashtabula County Career Technical Center (A-Tech), and I am speaking on behalf of my school, the Ohio Association of Career-Technical Superintendents (OACTS), the Ohio Association for Career-Technical Education (Ohio ACTE), and the Ohio Association of Comprehensive and Compact Career-Technical Schools (Ohio CCS). Together, these organizations form the foundation of Ohio's career-technical education (CTE) system, advocating for our students, educators, and communities to build a skilled and competitive workforce.

I wish to express our sincere gratitude to the administration and legislature for their steadfast support of career-technical education in recent years. The \$300 million in expansion and facilities grants from the previous budget, along with teacher licensure flexibility from last year's House Bill 432, have significantly advanced CTE growth in Ohio. Across the state, this support has fostered innovation and opportunity, and we are deeply appreciative of your leadership in recognizing CTE as a vital component of Ohio's economic future. With this progress in mind, below we include our budget recommendations to sustain and enhance these efforts:

Restoring Career Awareness and Exploration Funding

We are concerned about the elimination of career awareness and exploration funding in the House Substitute Budget Bill and urge the Senate to reinstate this critical \$16.5 million earmark for FY 26-27. Over the past two state operating budgets, this funding—supported by the DeWine Administration and General Assembly—has enabled Ohio's 90 Career Technical Planning Districts to deliver essential career-focused services, including career fairs, job awareness resources, internships, shadowing, mentorships, and hands-on learning experiences. These programs reach students in urban, suburban, and rural areas, assisting them in making informed career decisions and aligning their education with Ohio's workforce needs. In my own district as a result of the funds, we are now able to offer career awareness activities to every student in our CTPD. I have a 3-D name plate on my desk that was designed 3-D printed, painted and delivered by middle school students. Another middle school in our county has a small hydroponic operation thanks to these funds.

These dollars also complement recent investments, such as \$100 million for CTE equipment and \$200 million for facility upgrades. Without them, schools may need to reduce these vital services, limiting student access to career development opportunities and potentially impeding Ohio's workforce goals. We respectfully request its restoration.

Addressing Funding Challenges for CTE Facilities

Career-technical education (CTE) in Ohio is experiencing remarkable growth, fueled by heightened student interest, strong employer demand, and significant state investments. According to the latest budget simulations for Joint Vocational School Districts (JVSDs), between 2020-2025 the average enrollment increase of students attending JVSDs across the state is 22.3%. But a lingering impediment to this growth continues to be the inadequacy of the current funding framework for facility construction and renovation. Despite the recent \$200 million investment into our facilities, 24 career-technical schools applied and did not secure funding for their expansion goals given budget limitations. Many of those applicants still have shovel-ready construction projects that may never commence due to financial constraints.

The Ohio Facilities Construction Commission (OFCC) process, while effective for traditional K-12 schools, does not adequately address the unique demands of CTE institutions. A single CTE lab—such as an automotive repair bay or healthcare simulation suite—can cost upwards of \$2 million to build and equip with cutting-edge technology, far exceeding the scope of typical classroom construction. Yet, the OFCC process requires local districts to provide a substantial match, often through large levies that burden community resources. Over the past ten years, only three JVSDs have successfully accessed OFCC funds, highlighting the system's limitations.

To address this, we had proposed the creation of a legislative study committee to develop a tailored, sustainable funding solution for CTE facilities, potentially including a dedicated funding stream for capital projects or a grant program for smaller-scale renovations. Encouragingly, the House has included a facilities study committee in its budget package, adopting our suggestion. We strongly support this amendment and hope the Senate will also endorse it to ensure CTE facilities receive the specialized support they require.

Strengthening Ohio Technical Centers

Ohio Technical Centers (OTCs) play a crucial role in our workforce development strategy, providing short-term, high-impact training to hundreds of adult learners each year. With a 97% job placement rate, OTCs have proven their value by connecting graduates to careers in fields such as trucking, electrical work, and medical assisting. Our OTCs also provide customized training for their local employers, like a current project we are working on with Plastpro, a company Governor DeWine mentioned in his state of the state address.

Additionally, we strongly support the OTC Plus program, which allows high school students on waitlists to access CTE training through OTCs. Over the past year, we have sought clarification that OTCs could draw Higher Education Institution (HEI) funding for these students, similar to the College Credit Plus model—we are encouraged the House included such clarifying language in its budget package. We applaud this amendment and urge the Senate to support it as well, ensuring the program's sustainability and continued success.

Updated Formula Inputs for JVSDs

The Governor's Executive Budget proposes a significant enhancement to the school funding formula, allocating funds to Joint Vocational School Districts (JVSDs) based on current

enrollment data. This marks a shift from the previous state operating budget, which relied on prior year enrollment figures. Given the substantial growth in JVSDs over recent years, we strongly support this change, which aligns their funding structure with that of traditional school districts. While the House has retained this update in principle, its proposed “bridge” formula diverges from the Executive Budget’s approach and alters how funds are distributed. We seek to ensure the final budget reflects enrollment-driven funding for JVSDs.

Conclusion

Career-technical education is not merely an educational option—it is a cornerstone of Ohio’s economic future. With the House’s thoughtful amendments on facilities and OTC funding, alongside the restoration of career awareness funding, we can better equip students to lead Ohio forward. On behalf of A-Tech, OACTS, Ohio ACTE, and Ohio CCS, thank you for your ongoing partnership.