

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chairman Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee thank you for the opportunity to provide this interested party testimony on House Bill 96, the State Operating Budget.

My name is Tish Jenkins, and I serve as Superintendent for GOAL Digital Academy. GOAL Digital is an online community school that offers a unique learning model focused on student success. We serve students in the central Ohio region and offer seven in-person learning lab locations in Cardington, Delaware, Galion, Mansfield, Marion, Mt. Vernon, and Newark. Through these learning labs, GOAL Digital offers, but cannot require, a blended model of learning where students receive face-to-face adult support to help them learn, set goals, and prepare for their futures.

While there are many items in House Bill 96 that we are following, our requests to this body are focused on our ability to serve students where they are no matter what their needs may be. We are requesting language for a pilot program via amendment SC2558, to allow GOAL Digital to operate a blended learning model that would require students to attend some in-person classes. Under current law, an online community school cannot offer other models. This pilot program would allow an existing, established, and quality online community school to offer both an online learning program and a blended learning program. Through this program, GOAL would be able to serve some of our highest risk and most in need of additional support students through in-person learning for at least 50% of the time (i.e., blended learning model), while other students may continue to learn online for at least 50% of the time (i.e., online instructional method).

It is important to note that this pilot program would not need additional funding, however, an online community school that participates in the program would be eligible to receive the additional funds provided to brick-and-mortar community schools for DPIA, building, transportation, and nutrition services.

Disadvantaged Pupil Impact Aid (DPIA) helps fund vital initiatives to support wraparound services for Ohio's students who face a number of challenges. The funds are intended to help students overcome obstacles and prepare for future success. All traditional and community brick-and-mortar schools are eligible to receive DPIA as this funding is based on a district's economically disadvantaged percentage. Current law excludes Dropout Prevention and Recovery (DOPR) e-schools from these funds and our students are deemed ineligible, however the House added a provision (EDUCD29) that would make all e-schools eligible for DPIA. Under this provision, e-school students would be eligible for half the amount of funding, \$211 per-pupil, versus what brick-and-mortar students receive which is \$422 per-pupil.

There is strong rationale for providing DPIA funds to DOPR e-schools. Our schools primarily serve "at-risk" students many of whom have experienced trauma in their lives and are dealing with numerous social and emotional issues. For many students, a DOPR school is their last opportunity for success. Some of the most common barriers our students experience include parenthood, extreme poverty (200% of the federal poverty level), homelessness, sexual and/or physical abuse, drug and/or alcohol abuse, bullying, limited English proficiency, high mobility and family disruptions, grade retention/age-for grade, being in the foster care system, loss of caregivers and parents, and severe physical and/or mental health conditions.

My colleagues and I respectfully ask that you amend HB 96 to restore the provision in EDUCD29 qualifying e-schools for DPIA funding. We will use DPIA funds to hire the professionals and specialists that will help our students with the wraparound services they need. Without the proper support for the alternatives our schools provide, many of these students would be high school dropouts living in our communities with the probability of community dependence for an indefinite amount of time. Please help us help them, they are so deserving of every opportunity we can give them to succeed.

Chairman Cirino and members of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony and I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Tish Jenkins

Goal Digital Academy Superintendent

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