



National Inventors Hall of Fame®

Senate Finance Committee Hearing on House Bill 96 (State Operating Budget)

Testimony of Marissa Metze, Director, Major Gifts National Inventors Hall of Fame

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on House Bill 96 today. My name is Marissa Metze, and I am a Director of Major Gifts at the National Inventors Hall of Fame in North Canton, Ohio. I am here today to urge the Senate to restore the House's appropriation for Camp Invention.

For over 50 years, the National Inventors Hall of Fame has been at the forefront of illuminating the legacies of world-changing inventors and preparing the next generation of scientists, inventors and scholars. We partner with the United States Patent and Trademark Office to honor our Hall of Fame Inductees whose inventions have made a positive impact on the world and to provide youth with creative, hands-on learning experiences through summer, in-school and afterschool STEM programming.

Camp Invention is our flagship summer program. It launched 35 years ago and has since grown its national reach to impact over 120,000 students in grades K-6 last year alone. This includes over 14,000 young Ohioans from 146 schools or districts across 39 counties in the Buckeye State.

The STEM curriculum for Camp Invention aligns with Ohio's science learning standards, and there is data showing a single week at Camp Invention can improve students' math and reading test scores, school attendance and college aspirations. Facilitated by local Ohio educators, the program not only provides teachers with valuable professional development opportunities but also fosters a supportive learning environment where students engage with challenges and develop the resilience, creativity and problem-solving skills needed to become future innovators and entrepreneurs.

Since 2022, the National Inventors Hall of Fame has received funding from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce's Summer Learning and Afterschool Opportunities Grant. We understand DEW developed this grant in part by leveraging post-COVID federal dollars received via the American Rescue Plan Act (also known as the ARPA-ESSER Fund). The National Inventors Hall of Fame used this grant funding to expand the number of students who have access to Camp Invention. In fact, our nonprofit reached 843 students in 20 different school districts in 2024 thanks to the state's support.

Maintaining this broader reach (predominantly within low-income communities) is unfortunately in jeopardy given that the federal funding has dried up. Without replacement

funding to fill this gap, it will become more challenging for Camp Invention to continue offering its robust STEM programming to as many students and school districts in future years.

To support the positive impact Camp Invention has on STEM education, the Ohio House added a \$250,000 yearly appropriation for Camp Invention in DEW's project and program support line item. Additionally, the House's appropriation would have required the National Inventors Hall of Fame to use state funding to help enroll more low-income students in our successful STEM-focused summer camp.

While disappointed that the Ohio Senate removed this funding for Camp Invention, the National Inventors Hall of Fame has adjusted our request for the omnibus amendment by adding the requirement of a match. Under our proposed omnibus amendment, the National Inventors Hall of Fame must provide 1:1 matching funds for the state appropriation. We believe this revised amendment reflects a commitment from the National Inventors Hall of Fame to build upon the state's investment to ensure there are robust STEM education offerings in years to come.

In closing, we thank DEW and the Legislature for their support over the past several years, and on behalf of our organization and the students and families we serve, we urge you to restore the National Inventors Hall of Fame's appropriation in House Bill 96. Our request will help give hundreds of young Ohioans access to high-quality summer camp programming that can kick-start their interest in STEM — while also leading them toward a successful career.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I welcome any questions from the committee.