Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee

Public Testimony
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My name is Stuart Muszynski, President and CEO of the Values-in-Action Foundation, a national nonprofit focused on social-emotional learning, workforce readiness, and kindness-based programming in K–12 education.

Through our Kindland initiative, we work with more than 5,000 schools across all 50 states, **including 1164 schools here in Ohio, covering 85 counties.**

I also want to thank you for your leadership on the bipartisan Kindness Resolution. It reflects a clear decision to lead in shaping the culture of our communities across Ohio.

We are here today in support of that resolution and the role it plays in strengthening school and community culture across our state.

Kindland is built around a simple idea. The tone of a school or a community is shaped by everyday actions. **Those actions are shaped by the ideas we put into our minds. Kindness is one of the most powerful ideas humanity has, because it is intrinsic to each of us and grows organically within people and their ecosystems.**

This resolution reinforces that work. It recognizes the importance of making these everyday actions visible and part of a broader culture across Ohio.

The Kindland work gives schools a practical way to make those actions visible and consistent. It equips educators with simple, free resources to elevate kindness within what they are already doing.

What started as a simple idea in 1994 is now reaching schools across the country. **This past year, we reached more than 600,000 students, with Ohio as the anchor state with more than 202,000 students in 1134 schools.**

That represents a 57 percent increase in schools and nearly a 96 percent increase in students reached compared to the previous year.

Nearly 78 percent of teachers reported that students were engaged or highly engaged during the program.

And 70 percent of participating schools were new, which shows continued growth into communities we had not reached before.

In Ohio, more than 300 schools participated, with strong engagement across the state.

But what matters most is what this looks like inside a school.

- **increased learning**
- **decreased absenteeism**
- **increased sense of community**
- **participating in the adjoining community**

Students are writing notes of gratitude to custodians and cafeteria staff.

Schools are building kindness weeks that extend beyond a single day.

Teachers are using these moments to start conversations that continue long after the program ends.

These are small actions, but they change the way a school feels. And when that starts to take hold, it extends beyond the classroom.

There is also strong research behind this work.

When kindness becomes part of a school culture, we see higher levels of engagement, fewer disciplinary issues, and stronger connections between students and staff.

Kindness is not a soft idea.

It is one of the simplest and most cost-effective ways to influence school culture in a positive direction, and it is something schools can implement immediately.

One parent who participated in last year's Summer of Kindness described how her daughter began to notice opportunities to help others in everyday situations where she didn't before.

What started as a simple activity for this student became a shift in how she saw the people around her. That kind of change stays with a student.The Kindness Resolution helps elevate this work and signals that it matters at the state level.

Building on this work, Ohio now has the opportunity to lead a national effort.

The United States of Kindness is a simple challenge. In 2026, individuals, schools, **businesses** and communities are invited to complete 250 Acts of Kindness and share those moments.

There is no cost to participate. There are no new requirements. It builds directly on what is already happening across our state.

Ohio has always played a leadership role in shaping ideas that extend beyond our borders. With the adoption of the Kindness Resolution and the work already underway, Ohio is in a position to lead this effort nationwide.

We are already seeing momentum, and we are committed to growing this work across Ohio.

With the leadership shown here, Ohio can help set the pace for what this becomes.

Thank you for your time and for your continued leadership. **Ohio already is the "Heart of it All." We believe that Ohio can also become "The Kindness State."**