

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF TERRI BENNETT
IN SUPPORT OF THE GRIT AMENDMENT #
BEFORE THE OHIO SENATE HEALTH COMMITTEE
April 30, 2025**

Members of the Senate Health Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of the GRIT Amendment and the continued funding of the GRIT Project. My name is Terri Bennett, and I bring to this conversation over two decades of experience across the K-12, career technical, and collegiate education systems, including roles in instruction, curriculum design, and educational administration. I now serve in a position focused on the analysis and communication of assessment data (for counties, organizations, schools and individuals) as well as the utilization and empowerment of Assessment and Coaching in career Discovery, Preparation and Placement (The GRIT Project 5-Step Process); work that places me at the heart of helping to identify and maximize interests, abilities, and aptitudes, and translating that into meaningful, purpose-driven careers.

I. Career Pathways as a Bridge Between Despair and Opportunity

My current work centers on the belief that people are far more capable than they realize; especially when given the opportunity to understand their own potential. The GRIT Project's 5-Step Process, which begins with Assessment and the critical game-changing step of Coaching continues through career Discovery, Preparation, and Placement, has transformed the way our communities think about work. These are not generic pathways; we are using real data to match real people to personalized career exploration and actionable pathways to real opportunities.

This same data is also transforming how schools design their workforce learning environments. For example, in one county, what was initially planned as a standard career center evolved into a more targeted and effective hub. The GRIT assessment data indicated that the greatest local need, and student alignment, was in healthcare. As a result, the design was revised to include more space for healthcare training and a flexible training space that can rotate based on regional workforce demand. Not every school should not be training welders, but some schools should be training a lot of welders. The State made these Innovation Grant investments, but GRIT can ensure they reach their highest impact by aligning facilities and programming with actual workforce pipeline data.

The shift in confidence and sense of purpose comes when an individual sees, often for the first time, that they have what it takes to succeed in high-demand fields like healthcare and behavioral health. In a recent meeting at a Monroe County school, it was shared that a student who had been stalwart about his career focus, changed his path to radiology after his coaching session, not realizing that radiology could be an option and how well his aptitudes and interest aligned. For most, the problem is not a talent gap, it is an exposure gap. Too many have never considered themselves to be a match for these roles, and too few systems exist to help them get there. That is the gap the GRIT Project is closing, by illuminating possibilities and preparing people to seize them.

II. A Data-Driven Solution to a Health Care Workforce Crisis

Through this model, over 26,000 individuals have been assessed and coached, with more than 8,000 have the aptitude and interest to pursue careers in healthcare or human services. These are not just statistics, they represent real people in real counties who are ready to step into critically needed roles. According to JobsOhio, the Southeast Region alone will need nearly 5,000 healthcare and behavioral health professionals by 2030. The GRIT Project has already identified and has begun preparing that workforce.

Equally important, this data is now helping to shape the physical and programmatic infrastructure being developed with State funding. As Innovation Hubs rise across Ohio, GRIT can ensure they are not built on evidence rather than assumption, so that facilities match the interests and abilities of learners and the needs of the region. Schools no longer need to guess which trades to emphasize; designing is data-driven and the result is better student engagement, better job placement, and better return on investment for the State.

As someone who has worked across the entire education pipeline, I can say with certainty that this initiative is succeeding where others have struggled. By personalizing career pathways, removing barriers to access and data-driven decision-making, we are no longer hoping individuals find their way, we are walking with them, from assessment to employment.

III. Work as the Foundation of Health and Hope

In these communities, the relationship between work and wellness is undeniable. As a former educator and Aspire Director, I have seen the consequences of hopelessness: chronic absenteeism, disengaged youth, addiction, incarceration. I have also seen the healing power of work. It restores dignity. It builds community. It fosters resilience. When you can bridge the healing power of work with self-efficacy and the empowerment of personalized career assessment, coaching, discovery, preparation, and placement; the result is a workforce pipeline and a resilient community.

The GRIT Project recognizes that for someone to be well, they must be able to work, and that work itself can be part of the healing process. Our efforts to embed workforce readiness into high school programming, summer credentialing camps, recovery support services, and remote workforce hubs. By aligning these systems with regional labor market data, we aren't just delivering hope, we're delivering jobs that fit.

IV. Why Continued Investment Is Essential

The data proves that we are making progress; a pre-qualified workforce pipeline; expanded credentialing opportunities; created access in isolated regions. But we cannot sustain this momentum without continued investment from the State. Every success story we have helped write was made possible by your support.

The Innovation Grants funded by the State are wise and forward-looking investments—but their true potential is only realized when they are aligned with real-time data and career demand. GRIT is the mechanism that translates those capital investments into human outcomes. Without continued support, not only do we derail the trust that has been carefully cultivated with the Appalachian communities, but it would also halt the growth of these blossoming sustainable workforce pipelines.

Conclusion

As someone who has dedicated my career to education and workforce development, I passionately advocate for the continuation of GRIT Project funding. It has garnered my passion and support because I have seen it work, it is data-driven, and most importantly, I support it because it is restoring hope in regions that desperately need it.

Thank you for your time, your consideration, and your commitment to Ohio's workforce and communities.

Respectfully submitted,



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