

Testimony by Angela Siefer

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“Education Program Support”

FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology)

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Schuring and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I’m Angela Siefer, a parent of a two high school students and one pre-school student. I’m a mentor for the Bexley High School *FIRST* Robotics Team.

I’ve had a front row seat to a high school experience I am quite jealous I never had. I’ve watched high school students go in search of a math textbook, not to do homework, but to fix a problem. I’ve watched high school students stay late after school and go in to school on holidays, weekends and snow days. Because they wanted to go! These things happened because of the *FIRST* Robotics Competition. Teams have 6 weeks to design and create a robot that they will take to a regional competition. Hands on learning that motivates kids to solve problems and work together as a team, all in a high-pressure environment.

I have watched my son come home after working on the robot and (I am not exaggerating) gush with everything he wanted to share about his experience. He wanted to talk about particular problems they were solving, difficulty getting the parts they needed at reasonable prices, how to get the freshman involved. He is learning engineering skills, leadership skills and so much more.

August, 6, 2014, the Pew Research Center on Internet Science and Tech released “AI, Robotics and the Future of Jobs”. They had canvassed technology builders and analysts as to the future of jobs in a world of artificial intelligence and robotics. The report states “Many are concerned that our existing social structures—and especially our educational institutions—are not adequately preparing people for the skills that will be needed in the job market of the future.” I agree. Do any of us doubt that the kids involved in robotics programs are guaranteed jobs? And not just any job - well paying, exciting jobs.

Higher education knows we need more STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) students. Higher education so respects *FIRST* programs that they offer scholarships specifically for high school students who have participated in *FIRST*. Just in Ohio, the following scholarships are available to students accepted by the university and who have participated in a *FIRST* program:

1. Columbus College of Art and Design - \$1000 scholarship per year.
2. Case Western University – Two \$10,000 scholarships per year for four years.
3. University of Cincinnati College of Engineering and Applied Science – up to twenty-five \$2,000 scholarships.
4. Ohio State University – Up to twenty \$1000 scholarships, renewable up to four years.
5. Xavier University – two \$2500 scholarships renewable up to \$10,000.
6. Youngstown State University – one \$1000 scholarship per year renewable up to \$4000.

That's just universities in Ohio. There are an additional 10 corporate and foundation scholarships available to students who attend a university in Ohio. There are over 180 educational institutions in the United States that provide over \$20 million dollars in scholarships to students involved with *FIRST*. What other program so clearly leads to financial support for the higher education of our kids?

I asked CoverMyMeds for a quote I could include in my testimony. CoverMyMeds is a fast growing software company here in Columbus. You may have seen the CoverMyMeds sign from I-70 on Two Miranova. They have experienced over 100% growth for multiple years. They have won multiple awards as a best place to work yet they have trouble finding local talent. Alan J. Gilbert, CoverMyMeds' Vice President of Engineering provided me with the following:

"We love Columbus and the vibrant software-engineering community here. But we've not been able find local candidates fast enough to keep up with our hiring needs. About half of our recent hires are remote and out-of-state. Robotics is a great combination of software, hardware, and 'just plain cool' that encourages students to learn how to build and program things and ultimately enter college engineering curriculums. Ultimately, a lot of those students will stay or return home and enter the workforce as software engineers."

I strongly support the state allocating funds for *FIRST* robotics in our schools. It is a very clear investment in Ohio and our future.