

Testimony in Support of House Bill 429
Senate Transportation, Commerce & Labor Committee
May 18, 2016
John Marshall, Grismer Tire

Good morning Chairman LaRose, Vice Manning, Ranking Member Cafaro, and members of the Senate Transportation, Commerce & Labor Committee.. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 429, legislation to make workers employed as automotive technicians eligible for the Incumbent Workforce Training Voucher Program.

My name is John Marshall. I am the part owner of Grismer Tire, a family-owned business since 1932. We employ over 200 workers in 25 retail stores and 2 commercial outlets across the state, primarily in the Southwest Ohio region. Of those 200-plus workers, 96 are employed as automotive technicians. I am a member of the boards of the Ohio Council of Retail Merchants and the Ohio Tire and Automotive Association, both of which are proponents of this legislation.

I first learned of the Incumbent Workforce Training Voucher Program at an event hosted by Governor Kasich, during which he encouraged attendees to apply for the opportunity. The next day, I tried to do just that, but learned that the retail and service sectors are expressly excluded from eligibility and the workers I employ as skilled technicians are unable to apply for training reimbursement. Therefore, I fully support House Bill 429's proposed expansion in scope of the program to make automotive technicians eligible.

The program was launched in 2013 to partially reimburse successful completion of employer-funded training of established business' existing workers. It targets 13 industries, one of which is the automotive sector. The training subsidized must relate to the employee's position or future advancement within the company. The types of eligible training include credit or noncredit classroom education related to the employee's field of work, computer proficiency, training related to new equipment, or instruction that leads to an industry recognized certificate. Eligible employees must work at least 25 hours per week and earn at least 150 percent of the federal minimum wage, which is currently \$10.88 per hour. Technicians employed by my company earn between \$27,000 and \$95,000 annually, with an average wage of \$50,000. These figures show that automotive technicians are well paid and that hardworking individuals can choose to build a career in this field. It is my understanding that applications are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis for each program year of funding. This legislation would not make changes to the application process, but would merely allow automotive technicians to be eligible to apply.

Allowing automotive repair technicians to qualify is consistent with the program's stated goals of allowing employers to retain and grow their existing Ohio workforce and create a statewide workforce that can meet the present and future demands in an ever-changing economy. Automotive Service Technician is listed as an "in-demand" job by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. A tremendous advantage of allowing the use of these funds for what we are proposing is that most of the businesses in this new category are small businesses that will invest their own money to pay for a portion of the training. These businesses will only select the most dedicated employees that are committed to pursuing a career in the automotive service industry, which will boost Ohio's economy by fulfilling these in-demand jobs.

This legislation is also consistent with the program's goal of limiting these funds to skilled employees in technical jobs. I have first-hand experience of how the automotive industry has evolved over the years. More recently, technology has taken a front seat in the functioning of my business. Computers now control the vital systems of automobiles and provide diagnostics for accurate repair. This technology is very costly, and has played a large role in the eradication of unqualified technicians and illegitimate

businesses. In order to keep up with the constantly evolving technological changes in the automotive sector, the repair industry requires skilled technicians with up-to-date training to remain competitive. Businesses in this sector incur large expenses for ongoing training for their employees, and increased access to workforce development initiatives like the Incumbent Workforce Training Voucher Program will help to offset this essential cost.

Lastly, the application process for the program opens in September of 2016. In order for auto repair technicians to be eligible for the \$7.5 million that has already been appropriated for FY17, the bill must receive a favorable vote by the full Senate before you leave for summer recess. Therefore, I urge the committee's support and swift passage of the legislation.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to try and answer any questions you may have.