



PROVIDING APPALACHIAN YOUTH OPPORTUNITY

Chairman Kick, Ranking Member O'Brien, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to offer an overview of the iBelieve Foundation's funding request via amendment to the state operating budget (HB 110).

The iBelieve Foundation is a 501(c)3 in partnership with the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio. The initiative was created to provide 21st Century educational and experiential opportunities for Appalachian youth. What began as a summer camp for 36 students has transformed into year-round programming involving hundreds of students across all 32 of Ohio's Appalachian counties. iBelieve's goal is to inspire leadership that results in positive change – in our schools, communities, region, and the world.

Since 2011, the iBelieve Foundation's programs have provided over 7000 cost-free opportunities for students to develop the skills, behaviors, and attitudes necessary for success in high school and beyond. Our emphasis in teaching these life skills is to set our students up for successful future endeavors – whether that be entering the workforce, joining the armed forces, attending an institution of higher education, or entering a skilled trade apprenticeship. Our workshops not only improve career readiness and educational attainment among our students, but also create champions for the Appalachian region who will continue to give back to their communities.

Despite increased difficulty with fundraising and barriers to participation in 2020 due to COVID-19, we continued our important work through virtual means. The pandemic illustrated that the need for educational services and opportunities for connection among our students was greater than ever. We have worked tirelessly on plans for our 2021 workshops, preparing for in-person and virtual circumstances. The increase in our budget ask from the last biennium reflects our intention to expand our summer-specific programs to year-round involvement. In a time when many Appalachian students have faced learning loss, food insecurity, and significant technological barriers, it is more important than ever to rebuild confidence, make connections, and provide service opportunities to support the community.

The iBelieve Foundation has received funding from the biennial budget process for the past two operating budget cycles through the Development Services Agency, but has historically not been included in the as-introduced version. The legislature, and in particular the Appalachian coalition, has continued to see value in the leadership skills, experiential education, and community service opportunities provided through our programs. In order to continue this integral work, we are requesting **\$250,000 per fiscal year** (for a total of \$500,000) through the state budget.

The iBelieve Foundation is committed to improving the Appalachian Region through its best asset-our children. We respectfully request your support for this amendment to HB 110, and look forward to our continued partnership.