

May 17 2021

The Ohio Senate
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the committee:

My name is Jed Metzger, and I am the President and CEO of the Lima/Allen County Chamber of Commerce serving over 850 members. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 110, Ohio's FY 2022-2023 budget bill as it relates to the Student Wellness and Success fund.

The Chamber is the community's leading advocate and champion for business. Our primary objective is to create a climate of growth and success in our community.

We work with schools and organizations to ensure that children can enter the workforce with both the technical skills and the soft skills to succeed in their careers, and also in life.

Research has shown that there is an important link between children who are ready to learn going on to become adults who are ready to work.

I am also a proud member of ReadyNation. ReadyNation is an organization of more than 3,000 business leaders nationwide, with about 80 in Ohio, who are dedicated to supporting evidence-based policies, from prenatal to career, that help children grow up to lead productive, successful lives. ReadyNation backs greater investments in wraparound services, such as those offered in the Student Wellness and Success initiative in the state budget.

ReadyNation is part of Council for a Strong America, which unites the business leader voice with other voices such as law enforcement, ministry, retired generals and admirals, and prominent athletes. These voices all support greater investment in evidence-based policies that bolster children's growth and development. We believe that these investments are vital to the growth of the current and future workforce.

Recently, Council for a Strong America released a report on the Student Wellness and Success initiative. This new report, entitled “Investing in Student Wellness and Success in Ohio,” makes the case that Ohio schools, in partnership with organizations in their communities, can support student mental and physical health and build healthy environments for students to learn and grow. We also know that our schools and our partners here locally have benefited from the Student Wellness and Success funds that have helped children develop the skills to cope with challenges in their lives and the world around them. The state operating budget being discussed right now calls for an expansion of these funds, and we hope that these increases are followed through.

The report shows us that an investment in student wellness is an investment in a generation. Partnerships between schools and with provider organizations in their communities are uniquely positioned to support student mental and physical health and build healthy environments for students to learn and grow. In the end, these efforts can make for a safer society, and also result in more young people graduating from high school, ready to embrace the next stage of their life, whether that path includes postsecondary education leading to a degree, certificate or credential, a skilled trade, or a military career.

Beyond promoting learning, efforts that help students develop social skills and emotional regulation strengthen the overall health and safety of our society. Children exposed to violence or other traumatic experiences demonstrate greater resilience when they have the social-emotional processing skills needed to recover. For children at risk for engaging in violence or crime in adolescence or early adulthood, healthy psychological development can help them stay on the right track.


Parents know that their children are struggling. In response to a family wellbeing survey administered last fall, 59 percent of parents reported that they had a child who was currently or had recently experienced mental or emotional health challenges, such as loneliness, difficulty handling emotions, or difficulty coping with stress.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected students in many ways—isolating them from their peers, severing relationships with the caring adults in their schools, decreasing access to regular meals, and limiting opportunities for personal development. In summer 2020, public health researchers conducted a comprehensive analysis of research that might help us understand how social isolation could impact children’s mental health and wellbeing. This analysis of 63 studies found that children who experienced loneliness were more likely to struggle with depression or anxiety for up to nine years later. Longer periods of loneliness, in particular, predicted future struggles with mental health.

Business leaders know that improving child wellness will grow the economy by increasing the number of workers with a high school diploma and postsecondary education and training needed to fill increasingly demanding jobs. Alternatively, untreated mental health disorders (such as depression and conduct disorders) and untreated physical conditions (such as asthma and poor vision) tend to limit educational attainment. We also know that the best action is early action, and the benefits of such early action strengthen the entire community.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. I can be reached on my cell if you have any questions at 419-234-2600.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jed E. Metzger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "J" and "M".

Jed Metzger
President/CEO