



Impacting Poverty. Transforming Lives. Providing Business Results.

**Beth Gifford, Executive Director of Columbus Works, Inc.**

Senate Finance Committee

Interested Party Testimony- House Bill 110

May 18, 2021

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate General Government Budget Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address my support of the Columbus Works amendment to House Bill 110.

Columbus Works is a non-profit organization whose mission is poverty elimination through the provision of workforce training, job placement, and long-term wrap around services designed to remove barriers to sustained employment. Our long-term wrap around commitment to those we serve is five to seven years. The individuals we serve, our Members, come to us from households with incomes less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Requirements for participation are simple: that the individual is currently experiencing poverty, is drug free or willing to be drug free, and is stable in housing. (By that we mean they may be living in a shelter, or other housing insecure situation but are not at a homeless camp or on the streets.) We refer to those we serve as Members, and Members are members for life. During our 5 years we have served 575 central Ohio residents, provided training to 489, and currently have 410 actively engaged Members representing over 40 zip codes.

How do we do this? Columbus Works has innovated the only integrated operating system of its type, in the workforce space in the United States, that combines best-in class training, a personal Coach-Navigator, long-term wrap around services, a world-class brain-science approach to behavior modification to eliminate poverty, and trauma informed counseling; all designed to eliminate poverty and produce economic mobility resulting in poverty elimination. Long-term (5-7 years) wrap around support includes legal services, grocery resources, uniforms and tools for work, transportation to and from training, workforce housing partners, on-site behavioral and mental health, medical care partners including dental and vision, daycare partners, financial assistance renewing and/or obtaining personal identification documents, and more. In fact, it is this system that not only teaches individuals how to get out of poverty but also how to stay out of poverty. This is life changing not only for the participating Member, but for their families and neighborhoods. The end result has a positive generational impact, often breaking the chains of generational poverty.

We do all of our wraparound services at a cost per outcome of \$3800 per year. During that first year, Columbus Works Members go to work and begin earning wages that result in coming off Ohio's expanded Medicaid and SNAP. Savings to the State of Ohio as Columbus Works Members go to work and sustain that employment, via our innovative Coach-Navigator system is \$4635 the first year, including income tax paid. The second and subsequent years provide increases to both savings to the State and income tax revenue as Member earnings increase year over year.



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We are a place-based organization, with learning centers in multiple underserved neighborhoods serving residents of Columbus, surrounding suburbs, and Franklin County. We have formalized agreements with over 100 Employer Partners offering high-quality full-time jobs, in desirable industries such as healthcare, banking and financial services, manufacturing, distribution, mom & pop owned as well as large automotive care centers, construction, and technology. Employer Partners must offer full-time, not seasonal jobs, competitive wages with a defined career path for advancement, and Affordable Care Act compliant health insurance.

In 2020, even amid the COVID-19 crisis, 92% of our Members actively received services at 1-hour or more per month. Overall, 78% of working Members sustain employment one year or more with the same employer. In 2020, the average Columbus Works Member merit increase was 10%, while the national average is 4%, as a result of employers providing upskilling training. Also in 2020, 74% of Columbus Works Members sustained employment producing over \$8M in payroll, employers paid over \$600,000 in payroll taxes, and Members contributed over \$950,000 in income taxes.

It is compelling that poverty in Columbus, has increased significantly over the past 50 years. Nothing has changed, except more poverty, and more individuals stuck in low-wage jobs with no way to move up and provide a better life for their families. The same organizations are serving individuals as were serving in 1960. The same neighborhoods are impoverished. This compels us to say that we must disrupt poverty in central Ohio, that the way it has been approached in the past does not work. The only remedy for poverty is full-time, sustained employment in high quality jobs with a career path leading to credentials allowing the jump to middle-wage jobs in high demand industries.

It is our desire that the State of Ohio, through the ResultsOHIO project, would partner with us in this transformational work that produces a return to the taxpayers of the State of Ohio. We ask that our performance be acknowledged and the savings to the State of Ohio be shared back with us, to enable us to expand our service reach. Through this ResultsOHIO project, we will be able to add Coach-Navigators and increase our services to 4 times as many new neighbors, and provide on-going services, as we are able to support currently. We respectfully ask that this Committee acknowledge that the outcomes directly produced by Columbus Works result in savings to the State of Ohio, that a portion of those savings can fund our request as submitted through the ResultsOHIO application and verified by third-party experts.

Again, thank you for giving me the time to address the committee today to show how the amendment to House Bill 110 will allow for the Columbus Works, Inc. program to grow and continue to rise our neighbors out of poverty. Additional written testimony from our Members and Employer Partners was also submitted to the committee. If you have any questions about the ResultsOHIO program, please do not hesitate to reach out. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,  
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Founder, President and Chief Executive Officer  
Columbus Works, Inc.