HB 170 COMPUTER SCIENCE
TESTIMONY BY OEC
DIRECTOR, BRANDING & CULTURE
GEO MONEY
OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE
EDUCATION AND CAREER READINESS COMMITTEE
TUESDAY, MAY 23, 2017

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chairwoman Slaby, and Ranking Member Fedor: thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of House Bill 170.

My name is Geo Money. I am the Director of Branding & Culture for OEConnection, also known as OEC, a leading technology and software development company in Northeast Ohio. Since its inception in December, 2000, OEC has grown from 18 associates to 320, with over 280 located in Ohio. Approximately 150 of our Ohio associates are tech workers. I am also a board member of OHTec, which is part of the Greater Cleveland Partnership chamber of commerce focused on growing and supporting technology in Northeast Ohio for the benefit of local and regional businesses.

I am speaking to you today from the perspective of business. Companies in the state of Ohio, and the entire country, are in great need of qualified tech workers. An often quoted national statistic is that for every eight open tech positions, there is only one qualified tech worker. Which means seven positions are left open, waiting to be filled. For women and minorities, the ratio is even worse: 40 to 1. These figures hold true for regional hires in Ohio as well.

A big part of the reason for the lack of qualified workers is that there isn't adequate training in computer science early enough in our students' education. Ohio, through private enterprise, is able to train current members of the workforce who wish to change careers and move to technology positions. This is being done through numerous coding camps that specialize in this endeavor. But for Ohio students still in middle and high school, and in many of our colleges and universities, the current technology offerings are not adequate to help them learn the basics of computer science so they can determine if they have the aptitude for and interest in pursuing technology-related fields of study in college or as a career.

The United States, long considered a leader in developing new technologies, is falling behind. We simply do not have enough trained and skilled tech workers to develop these technologies and build and run our businesses. We're outsourcing much of our developmental thinking to areas of the world that have focused on technology, then we try and bring those workers to the US using H-1B Visas, etc., which is difficult, time-consuming and not always effective. We need to take the long view, and develop our own citizens to become the world technology leaders.

Several organizations, offer summer coding camps for middle and high school students. OEC sponsors many of these camps annually, helping our youth learn the basics of coding and helping them determine if computer science could be a long-term interest, or possibly even a career.

At the college level, few Ohio universities and colleges focus on, or even offer, computer science majors. This is because we have not effectively created the demand for these majors. Numerous studies point to the fact that students who are exposed to technology at an early age are more likely to pursue computer science in college and as a career. For this we need to not only build technology into the curriculum at our middle and high schools, but also train the educators (teach the teachers) so they can properly teach the computer science-related courses. We simply are not preparing students for the available jobs.

Recently, OEC and OHTec developed a phrase that we use often in conversations about the future of technology: 'Business runs on tech!' If a business is successful, more than likely it is because it is using technology effectively. Regardless of the market in which it competes, every business relies heavily on tech. And with the reliance on tech comes the reliance on tech workers. This reliance is only going to grow, and we need to be ready.

Tech is the future, and the present. But we have a huge skills gap. If we don't want to lose businesses, and the skilled tech workers working at those businesses, to other parts of the country and world, we need to train our students to fill those positions.

It's not enough say we want to grow our expertise in technology. If Ohio wants to be competitive with other parts of the country, we have to take action; we have to train our students and our educators in computer science-related fields of study; we have to provide avenues so those students who do have the aptitude and the interest in computer science can do so without being penalized or required to take extra courses; and we need make it easy for our school districts to support computer science-related courses. HB 170 supports each of these critical areas and so we strongly support HB 170.

Thank you to each member of the committee for their efforts on such a critical issue. As mentioned, business runs on tech. An investment in computer science is an investment in Ohio business. We urge members of this committee to show their support for computer science-related curriculum in our schools by supporting HB 170.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity.