

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chairman LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney and Representatives:

My name is Stuart Muszynski and I am the CEO and President of Values-in-Action Foundation. I am advocating on behalf of an amendment cosponsored by Reps. Bob Young and Phil Robinson, under Community Projects within the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, requesting \$7,650,000 per year for the Kindland Initiative, which also includes a comprehensive 16-week soft skills, employability training program for underserved communities. We have had great success with Kindland programming, as within Northeast Ohio Kindland has become embedded with 120+ other nonprofits, within 59 local municipalities, within all of the Cleveland and Akron schools, with the local police departments, with major businesses whose employees total over 100,000 and with 400 major community leaders. Within Northeast Ohio, Kindland documented 62 million acts of kindness in calendar year 2022. Within the state, we have 700 schools in 75 counties participating with Kindland curricular programming. A schools list as well as a white paper on the tangible school, community and workforce benefits of kindness is submitted as an exhibit to all of you. Endorsement letters from the Cleveland, Akron and Wellington Schools as well as from The Swagelok Company are also enclosed. Recently, the Ohio Schools Safety Council collaborated with Kindland to release to all the schools in the state “21 Acts of Kindness,” a challenge board for students to initiate acts of kindness, each one in memory of a Uvalde School shooting victim.

Our Proposal and Promise:

Over the next two years, Values-in-Action Foundation (VIA), through its Kindland and VIA Workforce Initiatives, seeks to make Ohio “The Kindness State” through comprehensive kindness, leadership and workforce training and community endeavors in all the major Ohio metropolitan as well as within the Appalachian Region.

Why:

> Because kindness as a core value, combined with character-and-values-based employability skills, will increase health and life satisfaction, decrease mental illness and addiction, abate violence and develop school, corporate, family and community cultures that make Ohio the best place to live, work, play and grow a business in the country.

This initiative aligns with the Governor’s legislative and budget objectives to spend approximately \$500 million on mental health initiatives within the state.

- A January 2023 OSU study showed how kindness decreased depression and anxiety.
- Workplace studies have shown how kindness increases employee engagement, productivity and workplace satisfaction.
- Kindness leads to gratitude. A 2017 study showed that gratitude decreased depression.
- Medical studies have shown that kindness decreases cortisol (stress hormone) and increases endorphins (happy hormone) and leads to longer and happier lifespans.

The Proof is in the Numbers:

- **VIA’s Believe to Achieve programming in the Cleveland Schools graduated 85% of most at-risk girls, with stellar academic performance and zero pregnancies.**
- **VIA’s Project Love programming in the Cleveland Schools improved middle school “conditions for learning” by 15% within three months of implementation.**
- **VIA’s kindness training intervention 2017-20 at Cleveland’s John Adams High School raised graduation rates from 50% to 93%, decreased suspensions over 67% and resulted in zero fights in school (in 2016, John Adams HS lost 4 boys to gang violence).**
- **VIA’s Workforce Training increased communication, self-awareness, collaboration and positive values in students and placed students in jobs with Swagelok, Majestic Steel, Orlando Baking Company and other major companies.**
- **VIA’s Kindland training at JFK High School resulted in an 80% decrease in violence.**

Page 2, Stuart Muszynski Testimony
April 20, 2023

> Anger, resentment and victimization have overtaken the country — resulting in increased mass shootings and increased school shootings. It takes **5 POSITIVE impressions to offset 1 NEGATIVE impression** in the human mind. Positives and kindness spread more positives and kindness, while negatives spread more negatives. Most school and mass shooters were out of the workforce and angry because of bullying, perceived victimization and other factors.

> Kindness is both an abatement to negative behaviors and a gateway to positive and productive individual and community behaviors. **See 4-min Kindland Vision video:** <https://youtu.be/nc6EAXo6sq4>

We are living in a nation that has witnessed the highest homicide count ever and more mass and school shootings than ever in this past year. This is not letting up; the trend is continuing. No mayor, no governor, no school superintendent, and no legislator can keep people safe. Whether in a school, a night club or a sweet sixteen party, all of us and our children are vulnerable.

But, with your assistance, we can give kindness a chance ... and we can witness the positive results that we know will occur. We can make Ohio “The Kindness State.”