



House Bill 135

School Attendance (Hall, T., Creech, R.) To require school districts to grant students excused absences from school for participation in 4-H and FFA programs and activities.

Devin Fuhrman, Chief Agriculture and Sponsors Relations Officer

House Primary and Secondary Education Committee

May 23, 2023

Chairman Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 135, legislation that will allow Ohio's future agriculture leaders to participate in all 4-H and FFA related activities while also balancing education requirements.

My name is Devin Fuhrman and I serve as Nationwide's Chief Agriculture and Sponsor Relations Officer. Nationwide was founded by Ohio farmers in 1926 and since that time has remained committed to supporting and providing solutions to help advance American agriculture. Helping our customers thrive in today's competitive farm, ranch, and commercial agribusiness environment, Nationwide is proud to be the No. 1 insurer of farms and ranches in the U.S. We're also the exclusive property-casualty insurer for Ohio Farm Bureau, seven other state Farm Bureaus and two of the nation's largest farmer-owned cooperatives. We are proud that in 2008, Nationwide & Ohio Farm Bureau 4-H Center opened as the first campus building for 4-H in the United States.

Today, I am asking for your consideration to support House Bill 135. Nationwide is proud to partner with the National 4-H Council to support the development and growth of youth across the country. The partnership continues to focus on increasing awareness and access to agriculture and expanding engagement with youth through the National 4-H Council. Young people who participate in 4-H are three times more likely to pursue a four-year college degree. Girls alone are 10 times more likely to pursue careers in a STEM-related field.

Technology is influencing and shaping just about every sector of agriculture. That stretches from crop and livestock production to large agribusiness management and scientific research. This evolution will enable agriculture to continue to meet the world's growing food and fiber demand. But fewer people are choosing agriculture careers. Recent data show there is a deficit of around 40,000 jobs in the industry. To overcome this challenge, 4-H is committed to helping expose young people to career opportunities in today's high-tech agriculture. But 4-H is about more than promoting agriculture to young people. Participation also instills the passion to pursue those careers.

Nationwide also is a long-standing partner with the National FFA Organization and FFA chapters across the country. Ohio FFA plays an essential role in preparing career and technical education students to enter the workforce. Nationwide is also the Presenting Sponsor of The Golden Owl Award® which allows us to also extend our support to agricultural educators who devote countless

hours, and often their own resources, to positively impact the lives of their students. Presented by Nationwide®, the Ohio FFA, Ohio Farm Bureau®, Farm Credit Mid-America and AgCredit, the Golden Owl Award recognizes agricultural educators across Ohio for their tremendous contributions to helping the next generation of agricultural leaders.

As part of our commitment to putting our customers first, we also offer eligible customers special savings on Nationwide farm policies. Also, one included endorsement for Farm Bureau members is coverage for youth organization animals (4-H or FFA).

On behalf of Nationwide, please vote YES on House Bill 135. The merits of HB 135 deserve consideration. Ohio currently doesn't consider 4-H or FFA activities as an excused absence. Nationwide believes that 4-H and FFA activities compliment education and enhance Ohio's future workforce. 4-H and FFA students would make up the missed school work while balancing hands-on learning and classroom learning. This innovative legislation will propel Ohio 4-H and FFA members who soon will be premier professionals in various career fields.