

House Primary and Secondary Education Committee

HB 135 Proponent Testimony

Billy Dennis, Principal of Amanda-Clearcreek High School

June 6, 2023

Chairman Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and other members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony on HB 135. Hello, my name is Billy Dennis and I am currently serving as the principal of Amanda-Clearcreek High School in Fairfield County. This 2023 marks the end of my fifteenth year as a rural school administrator.

I am here today to speak in favor of House Bill 135 and how it will positively impact Agriculture Education Students across the state. Ohio agricultural education teachers serve over 25,000 students each year, which according to the Ohio Department of Education makes up 18.65 percent of career technical education students and the largest CTE pathway in the state. Agriculture education operates under a three circle model comprising classroom experiences, the FFA, and supervised agricultural experiences (SAE). House Bill 135 will have the biggest impact on the FFA and SAE portions of agriculture education. It will allow agriculture education teachers to advocate for their students and provide unique and individualized opportunities which will ultimately directly impact a student's career after high school. FFA students take numerous trips throughout the year which expose those students to leadership opportunities, job shadows, career development events, contests, community service, and much more. As a school administrator, it is my belief that inclusion in such events does much for the development of these students into the locally sourced viable workforce our rural communities need to survive.

This Bill would mostly benefit students who are taking part in highly individualized and targeted experiences which may not necessarily be an arranged group excursion directly led by

House Primary and Secondary Education Committee

HB 135 Proponent Testimony

Billy Dennis, Principal of Amanda-Clearcreek High School

June 6, 2023

an instructor. These are often perceived as field trips, but these opportunities are much more than a single trip. These experiences allow students to take part in the real world aspects of their chosen pathway. House Bill 135 would allow students to be excused from school for these valuable experiences without their attendance records being negatively impacted. It would also allow them to have assurances that they could receive credit for any work completed while they were out as many districts have policies in place that either do not allow students to make up work when they have an unexcused absence, or policies that automatically dock a certain percentage when students are unexcused. Excusing these absences is not meant to encourage, or facilitate students missing school. As educators we hold school attendance as one of the greatest indicators of a student's potential to successfully graduate from high school. Sometimes, however, there are real-world experiences that cannot be duplicated within the classroom. These offer a student a long term benefit that would not happen otherwise.

Some examples of experiences students could gain from the passage of this bill and not having to choose between an unexcused absence and an FFA experience include showing livestock at the county fair, going on a job shadowing experience or limited internship experience with a local company, showing livestock at a state or national show, or competing in a rodeo, harvesting and/or planting crops, just to name a few.

Agricultural education students are some of the hardest-working and most dedicated young people with whom I get to work. Experiences like these help students further develop their ethic, perseverance, problem-solving skills, financial literacy, cultural awareness, and more. These out of the classroom experiences are often more impactful and make them better students

House Primary and Secondary Education Committee

HB 135 Proponent Testimony

Billy Dennis, Principal of Amanda-Clearcreek High School

June 6, 2023

in the end. This bill would allow school districts to help facilitate more individualized and targeted experiences. Doing so would reduce the number of whole group excursions and keep teachers in the classroom serving students. In turn, this would end up saving the district money on substitute teachers while providing these more individualized opportunities. This Bill will allow agriculture education students to earn work based learning hours which not only are a part of program compliance for the state of Ohio, but can also help students earn industry recognized credentials, the Ohio Means Jobs Career Readiness Seal, and to build their resumes.

There are concerns related to Ohio's End of Course Tests given each year in core subject areas. Teachers raise valid points with regard to the fact that students who miss instruction are at a disadvantage when it comes to being prepared for these tests. However, students who receive these excusals for targeted experiences are required to keep up with their studies while they are out. Excusal for the absence doesn't imply excusal from the work. In addition, allowing the types of individual experiences being discussed will also cut down on the number of larger group, blanket trips which impact greater numbers of students' attendance.

The passage of House Bill 135, would allow all students in the State of Ohio to have these opportunities and be able to explore agricultural pursuits without fear of falling behind in a class. Our agricultural education students are ready to meet the challenges of an ever changing job landscape. We have to be willing to help them. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

House Primary and Secondary Education Committee

HB 135 Proponent Testimony

Billy Dennis, Principal of Amanda-Clearcreek High School

June 6, 2023

Billy R. Dennis
Principal
Amanda Clear-Creek High School