



Representative Adam Mathews
56th House District

Representative Phil Plummer
39th House District

House Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Sponsor Testimony – H.B. 137
June 13, 2023

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and all honorable members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on H.B. 137, which authorizes a feasibility study for an Ohio program similar to the Kentucky Bluegrass Challenge Academy.

The Kentucky Bluegrass Challenge Academy is a program for at-risk youth located in Fort Knox, Kentucky operated by the Kentucky Department of Military Affairs that allows participating youth who are struggling with educational or behavioral issues an opportunity to change their future. The seventeen-month program consists of two main phases: a five-month residential phase in which students live on-site at Fort Knox and attend daily classes coordinated with a local school system and receive counseling, and a post-residential twelve-month phase in which graduates of the program work with Youth Challenge mentors to continue their education, enroll in college, or find meaningful employment. Whereas the students entering the program all struggle in their traditional environments, this program identifies four main goals for their graduates:

- 1) 100% of all attending students shall at minimum earn a high school diploma, GED, or an average of four high school credits
- 2) 100% of attending students will have a qualified mentor prior to graduating from the residential phase
- 3) 80% of graduates from the residential phase will have placement representing a return to high school, military, secondary education, vocational placement, or employment
- 4) 100% of graduates will increase their academic performance across key areas as a result of their participation in the program

The program encourages personal development within eight core components: life coping skills, academic excellence, job skills, responsible citizenship, leadership and followship, health and hygiene, service to the community, and physical fitness. Through this, it affords students a

valuable second chance at a crucial inflection point in their lives and instills in them the tools and experience to make decisions to improve their potential for a productive and meaningful life. Since 1999, the program has graduated over 4,000 students with an average of \$2.66 in social benefits yielded from every \$1 spent – a return on investment of 166%.

Many Ohio students have attended this program over recent years and benefitted from the life-altering experiences it offers. However, as it is currently only offered in Kentucky, Ohioans may only enroll subject to availability after Kentuckians receive priority enrollment, meaning that many Ohioans have been left unable to participate and with no corresponding alternative in our state. By simply authorizing a study on the feasibility of implementing a similar program here in Ohio, H.B. 137 offers a first step in changing this. As we continue to look for new and impactful ways to support the growth and development of our next generation, we aim to ensure that Ohio families have access to the best tools available to support their children right here at home. Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today, and we look forward to answering any questions you may have.