

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 provide proponent testimony on HB 137. My name is Joseph Kirby and I have the honor of being the Warren County Probate Juvenile Court Judge in Lebanon, Ohio. Also with me today is Charlie Gillespie who is a probation manager. We are consistently looking for options to help the youth and families that come before the Court. In our capacities at the Court we have had direct contact with youth/families that have attended the Bluegrass Challenge Academy in Kentucky and we have visited the Challenge Academy on a handful of occasions. This program was first introduced to us by a parent who was looking for options for her child. Referrals to Challenge Academies are done by custodians themselves, they are not ordered from our Court. There is also no cost to families for the program. We have had a handful of youth from Warren County attend the Bluegrass Challenge Academy and have had success. Not every program works for every child so it's nice to have options. Most recently a youth named Ammar, whose picture is below, graduated from the program this past weekend.

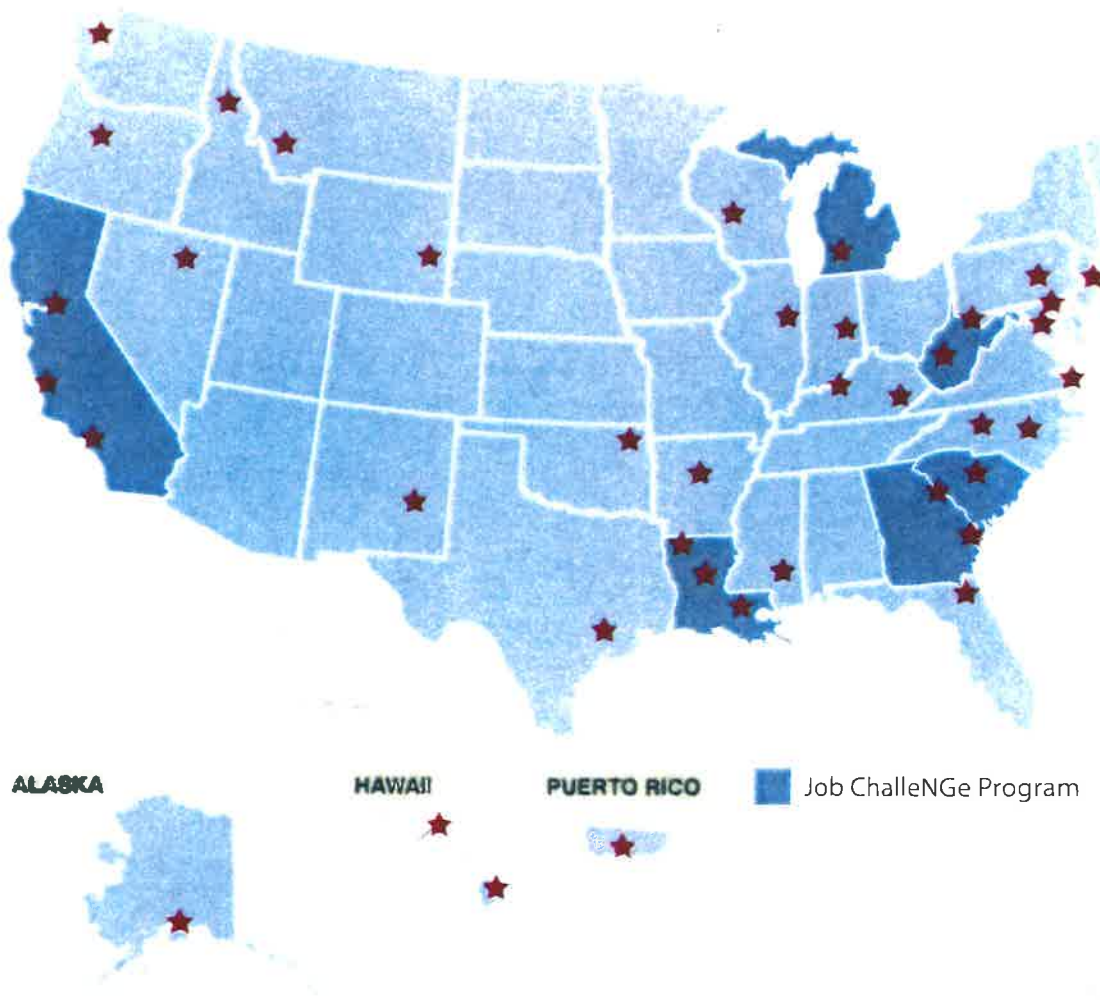


A lot of youth we come in contact with have struggled in a traditional school setting for a number of reasons and are typically credit deficient. Ammar went into the program as a credit deficient freshman who lacked initiative. He has made tremendous progress in the five months he has been there as a young person and will now enter his senior year this fall.

If you move forward with a feasibility study I think you will find there is quite a bit of research and data available on the ChalleNGe Academies, specifically from the RAND Corporation (a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help communities throughout the world). Their research and evaluation have found these programs to have positive effects on educational attainment, employment, and have lowered criminal activity. They also indicate that these academies are good societal investments that yield returns for our communities. Specifically, a return investment of 166 percent as mentioned by Representative Mathews last week to you. A recent 2022 RAND study estimates that the present discounted lifetime earnings for a ChalleNGe admittee will increase by \$43,514.

Below you see a national map of where the 40 ChalleNGe programs are located, each putting their own stamp on how the program is ran.

National Guard Youth Challenge Program Sites



As of March 24, 2022

Youth ChalleNGe is an established program, and operates 40 programs in 28 states plus Puerto Rico
Photo by the RAND Corporation

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on this bill, and we will be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.