



Trumbull County Educational Service Center

6000 Youngstown Warren Road

Niles, Ohio 44446

330 – 505 – 2800

Leading for Educational Excellence

June 20, 2023

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, ranking member Robinson, and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding House Bill 137.

My name is James Rook, and I am a Supervisor of Curriculum and Instruction at the Trumbull County Educational Service Center (TCESC). Located in Niles, Ohio, the TCESC provides educational and instructional services to support individual and school district leadership to meet the diverse needs of 25,000 students within our 20 Trumbull County school districts. I am here today on behalf of the TCESC to express my strong support of House Bill 137, which humbly requests the Ohio Department of Education to conduct a feasibility study regarding the implementation of a program in Ohio similar to Kentucky's Bluegrass Challenge Academy.

In partnership with the National Guard Bureau and the state of Kentucky, the Bluegrass Challenge Academy has satisfied the needs of more than 4,000 at-risk students since 1999. As an evidence-based, second chance program for students who are failing to progress in the traditional high school setting, the 17-month Bluegrass Challenge Academy model uses a combination of residential and post-residential phases to provide students with the structure that they desperately need to be successful. Upon completion of a nearly 6-month military-style residential program, the Bluegrass Challenge Academy continues to support students for an additional 12-months as they transition back to their traditional high school or pursue a post-secondary career path. Not only are students given the opportunity to get back on track towards graduation using mentorship and resources provided through the academy, students are pushed to pursue additional education, employment, or military service.

In 2007, the average high school dropout cost the economy approximately \$272,000 over his or her lifetime, which includes lower tax contributions, greater reliance on government assistance, and increased rates of criminal activity, according to the National Center of Education Statistics. It is estimated today, that this cost is equivalent to a little more than \$400,000. Relying solely upon federal and state funding, cadets who complete the program receive an educational experience valued at \$27,000, according to the Bluegrass Challenge Academy. This cost is less than a tenth of the impact to the economy of a student who fails to graduate high school or attain a GED. In addition to Kentucky, Michigan, Wisconsin, West Virginia, New York, and Pennsylvania have all implemented the Challenge Academy model. It is my belief that Ohio is well-positioned to provide this intensive and invaluable experience to our most vulnerable students.



Trumbull County Educational Service Center

6000 Youngstown Warren Road

Niles, Ohio 44446

330 – 505 – 2800

Leading for Educational Excellence

Over the course of the past five school years, the Ohio Department of Education has expanded and afforded students a number of alternative pathways to graduation. As a former teacher, middle school and high school principal it is evident to me that with the assistance of a program similar to the Bluegrass Challenge Academy, students who are most at-risk in Ohio will be given the time, attention, and focus they need to complete these requirements. Therefore, it is my firm belief that students, parents, and educators across the state of Ohio would benefit from a Youth Challenge program that replicates the success of the Bluegrass Challenge Academy and others.

I highly recommend the committee move forward with House Bill 137 and take the first step in supporting those students who are most vulnerable. I hope that you will strongly consider passage of this legislation. On behalf of the TCESC, thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

James A. Rook

James A. Rook

Supervisor Curriculum & Instruction

Trumbull County Educational Service Center

James.rook@trumbullesc.org