

## **Legislation promises funds to boost bio in Ohio**

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In an effort to grow a solid workforce for Ohio's burgeoning bioscience and biotechnology industries, Rep. Sandra Williams introduced legislation on Monday, March 31st, that would require the Ohio Department of Development to establish a grant program to promote job training and education in said sectors.

Williams' House Bill 518 would provide funding for institutions of secondary or higher education, political subdivisions and corporations that provide training in the areas of bioscience, biotechnology and health care.

According to Bio Ohio, a Columbus-based nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the bioscience industry in Ohio, there are more than 125 bioscience-related companies in Central Ohio.

Bill Tacon, senior director of workforce and education with Bio Ohio, said the bill would provide much-needed support to members of the Ohio workforce seeking to make a transition out of other manufacturing industries.

"This bill would certainly support where the state is going. This is a growth industry for the state and companies can't get individuals into those jobs quickly enough," said Tacon.

According to Tacon, the lack of a solid workforce puts a clear cap on any growth the state may be seeing in the bioscience and biotechnology sectors.

"What's happening is that some companies are showing growth limitations because they can't get their entry level staff quickly enough," said Tacon.

Leis Medical LLC of Vandalia, a manufacturer of orthopedic implants and instrumentation, was recently forced to scale back its expansion plans due to a vacuum of engineering and machine operation talent in the region.

"We currently could use 25 people tomorrow if we could find them. We're trying to increase our employment by 10 percent and are having trouble finding these people," said Harold Linville, chairman and chief business development officer at Leis Medical. "Our constraint as far as growth is concerned is our inability to bring in skilled individuals, as well as young people at entry level."

According to Bayiju Shah, chief executive officer of Bio Enterprise, a development and recruitment organization for Ohio's health care and bioscience companies, there is a crunch to meet the workforce demands at every level of the industry.

"No question, the biggest issue right now in the biosciences is the inability to find enough qualified and trained workforce," said Shah.

Shah said that HB 518 makes strides toward a demand-driven workforce, as promoted by Gov. Ted Strickland.

"These would be grants to develop customized training programs for employers that have open positions. It's about the partnership that can exist between the state and the private sector to train workers for positions that need to be filled," said Shah. ", "giving the Ohio Department of Development the power to spur bioscience job training, Shah said the legislation builds on the

governor's recent workforce executive order, which shifted many workforce-related responsibilities from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to the Development Department.

"By doing the reorganization that the governor launched, there will be a tighter connection between employers and job seekers. It aligns what businesses are looking for with what training needs to be provided," said Shah.

According to Shah, many bioscience companies are looking to educational institutions to grow and support their entry level work force needs.

"What is needed and what this bill provides is some of the capital needed to recruit the right types of faculty and capital for equipment needs," said Shah.

Through a training program in cooperation with Sinclair Community College, Leis Medical is at least one company that has made education and advanced training a priority among its employees.

"Sometimes we feel like we're the lone people out there supporting these training and educational needs," said Linville.

Statewide, several other companies, such as Ben Venue Laboratories in Cleveland and WIL Research Laboratories in Ashland, have forged partnerships with local colleges.

WIL Research Laboratories, which specializes in toxicology and bioanalysis, recently partnered with Mansfield's North Central State Community College to develop a two year degree in the biosciences. Ben Venue Laboratories has a similar arrangement with Cleveland State Community College.

Shah said that another important aspect of the legislation is its expansion of the definition of bioscience and biotech to include health care organizations.

A report released last year by BioEnterprise shows that Ohio led all other Midwestern states with \$244.3 million in health-care related biotech investments in 24 companies.

While Ohio's workforce may have to play catch-up with its job training, the industry is still on the upswing.

"What we're seeing in Ohio is a real growth in the bioscience and biomedical areas. Especially in manufacturing, companies are moving to Ohio," said Tacon.

According to a report by the Ohio Business Development Coalition, a nonprofit organization that markets the state for capital investment, Ohio ranks as the best state in the Midwest for venture capital investments in biotech innovation and business growth.

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Date Published: Monday, April 7, 2008