

Jim Fisher ✓

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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GOOD MORNING. THANKS FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK TO YOU.

TODAY, I REPRESENT BOTH TALENT 2025 AND E-MERGE WEST MICHIGAN, 2 COLLABORATIVE WEST MICHIGAN REGIONAL INITIATIVES CREATED TO ASSURE THAT TALENT AND ENTREPRENEURISM ARE DYNAMIC UNDERPINNINGS OF THE FUTURE WEST MICHIGAN ECONOMY.

I WORK IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR. I HAVE BEEN IN THE SCRAP METAL RECYCLING INDUSTRY FOR 40 YEARS, CO-OWNING AND LEADING OUR FAMILY BUSINESS IN MUSKEGON FOR 24 YEARS AND WORKING NOW FOR NEARLY 16 YEARS AS A DIRECTOR WITH PADNOS, A 109 YEAR OLD FAMILY SCRAP RECYCLING BUSINESS HEADQUARTERED IN HOLLAND, MICHIGAN.

5 ½ years ago, I co-founded TALENT 2025 and became its first President, serving for the first two years helping to create its foundation. It was founded with a mission of being a catalyst to ensure an ongoing supply of world-class talent in West Michigan. Its vision is to achieve the status of a Top-20 region globally by 2025. The goal is to have 64% of the West Michigan workforce credentialed with a post-secondary certificate or degree by 2025.

Today, over 70 business CEOs and 13 college and university presidents in West Michigan are part of a CEO council driving TALENT 2025 and its 15 working groups. The TALENT 2025 footprint is Michigan's Prosperity Region #4 including 13 counties. The region has a population of 1.6 million, 10,000 employers with an economic output of over \$50 billion and an adult workforce of 860,000. 70,000 students attend the 13 major colleges and universities.

TALENT 2025's CEOs convene stakeholders and facilitate collaborative working groups to illuminate performance gaps within the West Michigan talent system, evaluate leading practices as possible solutions, and advocate for selected leading practices to be implemented across the region.

Among many accomplishments, TALENT 2025 CEOs led a coalition of business leaders to advocate for increased state funding for Early Childhood Development by \$130 million.

2 ½ years ago, TALENT 2025, identifying our region trailing other US regions in substantial entrepreneurial activity which is a magnet for talent, created a working group to explore the possibilities of creating a West Michigan regional entrepreneurial ecosystem modeled after the highly successful CONNECT in San Diego, California. CONNECT was founded in the mid 1980's and has been instrumental in the founding of over 3,000 start up companies in the San Diego region, principally life science and technology businesses. 12 private and public West Michigan leaders, including a number of TALENT 2025 CEOs, visited CONNECT in San Diego in February, 2013 and then began working diligently to create a comparable West Michigan organization. The new organization, e-merge West Michigan, was formally launched with a board of 18 on October 10, 2014.

From the beginning, the design of the new organization was intentionally a public-private partnership. The board is inclusive of both public and private stakeholders, and the budget reflects contributions from the Grand Rapids Smart Zone and the private sector, principally TALENT 2025 CEOs. Grand Valley State University through its Richard and Helen DeVos Center for Entrepreneurism and Innovation is a major partner and will initially manage the new organization designed for one-stop support of and for entrepreneurs. Project managers for an active web portal and a new entrepreneur mentoring program will be the first staff. A permanent Executive Director will be hired by the fall of 2015. At that time, GR Current, an entity of GVSU, and manager of the incubators funded by the Grand Rapids Smart Zone as well as manager of a new MEDC Xcelerator program, will be merged into e-merge West Michigan, creating an overall \$1.5 million organization driving regional entrepreneurism. Targeted goals in the first 3 years: 375 company assists, 200 community mentors, 38 new companies, 300+ jobs and \$37.5 million in capital attracted.

Both the Grand Rapids and Holland Smart Zones are committed partners with e-merge West Michigan. The sustainability and growth of e-merge West Michigan depends on both public and private funding. The activities of e-merge West Michigan will drive significant entrepreneurial activity and growth in the Grand Rapids, Holland and Muskegon Smart Zones. It is critical to the long-term success of this new regional entrepreneurial ecosystem that the additional 15 years of school tax increment collection is in place to continue to make available the planned funding by the Smart Zones of e-merge West Michigan. The new organization represents the collaboration and collective impact that is reflective of the most successful entrepreneurial regions in the US today including San Diego, Austin, Texas, Boston, Massachusetts, Silicon Valley in California, and the Research Triangle in North Carolina. This legislative amendment is a necessary step to assure the West Michigan region is poised to be competitive in the most important economic development arena in the coming years.