

**Testimony on House Bill 49**  
**Offered by Susan Shelangoskie, Ph.D.**  
**5 April 2017**

Chairperson Smith and Ranking Member Cera, thank you for this opportunity to testify today on House Bill 49, the state biennial budget. My name is Susan Shelangoskie and I want to speak to you about funding for higher education in Ohio. When I graduated from high school, I didn't go to college. I needed to be financially self-sufficient, so I got a job—a few jobs, actually. After about a year of unfulfilling work, I really wanted to go to college. I didn't qualify for federal aid because even though I lived on my own and completely supported myself, even though my parents had no money to give me for tuition because they needed it for hospital bills—a different story—I still had to list my parents' income on the federal form. So I worked all day, and went to Cleveland State part time at night. Although I tried hard, I wasn't very successful. It was tough, for example, starting my chemistry lab after 9:30 at night. But then, after a several exhausting, disheartening quarters, something amazing happened. I applied and was selected for a state scholarship: as part of the program, I worked part time on campus, but the rest of the time, I was, finally, a full-time, day time student.

That scholarship changed my life. I was able to graduate in a little over four years. I received a world-class education from the outstanding faculty at Cleveland State, and I know that's true because I went on to earn a Ph.D. in English from a top research university, and I was one of the best-prepared students in my class. As I was finishing my graduate work, I returned to Ohio. I worked for four years at the University of Toledo as an instructional designer, where I helped over 100 faculty from all over the University develop materials for online courses that provided quality education to thousands of students. After I finished my graduate work, I moved into a faculty position at Lourdes University, where I have spent ten years teaching new generations of Ohio's young people. I don't mean to spend so much time talking about myself, but the point is this: Ohio made an investment in me, and I hope you will agree that the return on that investment has been substantial. Money put into education, invested in our young people, pays dividends; while [experts have shown](#) that giving more tax breaks to those in the highest income brackets does not.

The second point is this: in my ten years of teaching, I have seen my students increasingly weighed down by financial burden and anxiety, and for good reason. According to the [College Affordability Diagnosis](#), Ohio has the fourth-most expensive public colleges in the US, and in terms of state policies that affect families' ability to pay, Ohio ranks 45<sup>th</sup>. This means that students at our public colleges must work on average 48 hours a week—that is, more than a full-time job—in order to pay for full-time attendance. I can tell you from my own experience that those students are not achieving their full potential in their classes. And there's more: the state contributes only \$97 per student on need-based financial aid; that's 80% lower than the national average of \$474. It's no wonder enrollment in our public institutions is dropping more drastically than any other state ([15.3% since 2010](#)), which puts even more financial pressure on the whole system.

And now in this budget there are more cuts to education—and not because of dire financial necessity, but for the sake of a tax cut that disproportionately benefits the wealthy. The average Ohioan will see only a \$4 reduction in taxes. \$4. And many at the bottom end of the scale, like those struggling students working 48 hours a week, will be hit hardest by the regressive increase in sales tax. I doubt that a single Ohio taxpayer would look even one of my students in the eye and tell them they'd rather have \$4 than provide financial aid for worthy students. Can you? Education funding is not a handout, it's an investment in our future, and I hope it is one you are finally ready to make.