

## TESTIMONY TO THE OHIO HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

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Lakeland Community College

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Rogers, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, good morning. Thank you for allowing me to testify in favor of House Bill 186, legislation that would provide an income tax deduction for certain college-related expenses.

I am Morris W. Beverage Jr., President of Lakeland Community College. On behalf of our students and their families, and on behalf of all who are committed to workforce and economic development at Lakeland, thank you for the opportunity to offer written testimony on this important piece of legislation.

Lakeland Community College is a two-year college in Kirtland, in Lake County, Ohio with a mission to provide quality learning to meet the social and economic needs of our community. This winter we have over 7,600 students seeking either to complete a two-year degree that will lead to a specific job, complete the first two years of course work applicable toward a bachelor's degree at a four-year institution, take a course or several courses that will help them advance in their current employment, or gain a certification that will position them to be in demand in a new industry or technology.

Our core purpose is to “impact lives through learning” and we remain committed to our core value of “accessibility.” For us, this means being continually aware of the barriers that students face in participating in education or training, and doing whatever we can to remove or minimize those barriers. In addition to quality experiences we provide, many Lakeland students rely on us to do whatever we can to keep tuition affordable. Many of our students represent the first generation of students in their families, or are from families of low socioeconomic status, or fit

both of those demographics. During the 2016-2017 academic year, Lakeland had about 1,800 students who reported individual or family income levels that indicated they fall under the lowest quartiles of socioeconomic status. Many students look to us to prepare them for career changes that will put living wage jobs within their reach. Students over age 25 who did not previously have the support and direction to participate in post secondary education and training are now often faced with attempting to complete a program while having responsibilities to families of their own.

We work closely with our business community and continue to review data that guide our program offerings so that we can equip students with training and degrees that will meet the needs of those employers. The Alliance for Working Together, a consortium of manufacturers in Northeast Ohio has collaborated with Lakeland to create a Computer Integrated Manufacturing Degree. This was in response to their observations that education and training beyond high school was necessary for the employees they need to fill approximately 1,000 unfilled high tech manufacturing jobs that exist within 50 miles of Cleveland alone. At the same time, we are committed to doing all we can to respond to the projections from the Department of Job and Family Services that indicates that about half of the job vacancies in Ohio through 2018 and beyond will be in middle skilled job sector.

Even with this outlook, and even with all we do to keep tuition affordable, the cost of an education remains a daunting proposition for our students. We are delighted by the data which continues to support the long term returns on investment in higher education. One example is the study released on the Economic Benefit of Post Secondary Degrees by the State Higher Education Executive Officers and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. The study reinforces that there is a swift and escalating shift to jobs requiring post-secondary education. But in the here and now for our students, the storm of challenges they have to overcome on any given day, require much ingenuity, constant problem solving skills, and split decisions on allocating minimal individual resources. All of that takes a lot of energy and courage so as to successfully tread and navigate the waters of the many demands facing them. Any life preserver that can be tossed their way makes a big difference as they find their way through toward the promise of gainful employment and a better life.

House Bill 186 is one such supportive solution and incentive for students. We are like most of the two year colleges in the state, in that anywhere from half to sixty percent of our students take on some amount of debt and liability during the time they participate in our programming. And that is just the students for whom we have data through federal financial aid forms. The proposed Blair Deduction offers Ohio graduates relief with college related expenses and debt. The proposal to adjust the taxable income of recent graduates relative to their out of pocket Qualified Higher Education Expenses is a welcome consideration that recognizes the value of a student and family's investment in education and training, recognizes their struggles, and recognizes their desire to increase their ability to participate in and contribute to workforce and economic development in our state.

For our Lakeland students, it will help them during the period in which they are still leveraging minimal resources while trying to engage in a more productive endeavor within our economic community. Many Lakeland students upon graduation are behind financially, and this adjustment to taxable income offers them some relief as they set out on a new career. For our local employers, adjusting receipts upon commercial Activity Tax, is an incentive to hire our recent graduates and supports the many initiatives aimed at keeping skilled and educated graduates in Ohio. Our students and their families, as well as our local business community all stand to benefit from this supportive incentive

Thank you for your consideration.



Morris W. Beverage Jr.