

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE
FRIDAY, MAY 3, 2019**

**SUBMITTED BY
WESTERN GOVERNORS UNIVERSITY**

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Dr. Rebecca Watts, Chancellor at WGU Ohio.

In its wisdom, members of the last General Assembly formally recognized Western Governors University as a way to add an affordable option to Ohio's higher education system and help address a significant workforce issue—the need for more working adults with college credentials.

Since the Ohio affiliate of the university officially launched last year, nearly 1,900 Ohioans have begun their studies at WGU, seeking to improve their skillsets to strengthen their career potential.

I am reaching out to you today with grave concerns regarding the threat to student success posed by the Ohio House Finance Committee revisions to House Bill 166, lines 10532-10536. Students would be harmed by prohibiting the Ohio Chancellor of Higher Education from granting or renewing authorization to Western Governors University (WGU), a regionally accredited, private, nonprofit institution of higher education created by the governors of several states.

If enacted, this language would render Ohioans enrolled at WGU ineligible to receive the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG), the Ohio War Orphans Scholarship, the Ohio National Guard and Reserve Scholarship, loans from the Nurse Education Assistance Loan Program (NEALP), and any other state-funded grant-in-aid.

At a time when our state is focused on helping Ohioans compete in a technology-driven economy and reaching our ambitious attainment goals, it's hard to understand why this amendment was added.

While WGU receives no state subsidy for operations, 694 Ohioans enrolled at WGU currently receive an annual OCOG award capped at \$576. While this cap represents the lowest amount of any private or public institution, the financial support is meaningful for our at-risk students who are striving to better themselves, their families, and their communities.

Through our programs, designed for adult students working to strengthen their career pathways and re-tool for the 21st century workplace. Our average student age is 37, with more than 70 percent of our students working full-time. We serve a unique demographic than the Ohioans served by residential universities in the state.

Through our partnership agreement with Ohio's 23 community colleges, WGU guarantees credit transfer to all Ohioans who complete an associate degree at one of the state's two-year institutions prior to enrolling at WGU and offer those individuals a five percent tuition discount.

Currently 1,098 Ohioans are enrolled in WGU's Business College, 793 in our Health Professions College, 542 in our Information Technology College, and 743 in our Teachers College – all in-demand jobs in our state. For the 743 enrollees in our Teachers College, removal of institutional authorization would also remove approval for our educator preparation programs and remove WGU's authority to recommend these individuals for an Ohio educator license.

The harmful impact on hard-working, motivated Ohioans proposed in the revisions to House Bill 166 would have an extremely negative effect on individuals and families as well as workforce development efforts to grow our state's economy and competitive ability to attract business and industry to the state. We respectfully request that you remove the language in lines 10532-10536.

Further, the language in lines 24527-25436 would prohibit the Chancellor of the Ohio Department of Higher Education from recognizing or endorsing WGU and further prevent the Chancellor from facilitating any opportunities for us to share best practices with other colleges and universities in Ohio. Given WGU's 22-year history in successfully preparing graduates through a competency-based approach we believe that we can serve as an asset to other institutions in the state who are designing and delivering this model. Therefore, we respectfully request that you remove the language in lines 24527-24536.

Thank you for your time, I would be happy to answer any of your questions.