

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, MAY 8, 2019**

**SUBMITTED BY
LEANNA BILLINGS
MENTOR, OHIO**

Good morning, Chairman Oleslager and members of the Committee. My name is Leanna Billings. I am a manager of evaluation faculty at Western Governors University.

My husband and I live in Mentor, Ohio, and we both work at Western Governors University. We believe in WGU's important mission to provide affordable and accessible education adult learners that really need flexibility so as not to disrupt their families and current jobs.

Higher education should be prioritized for all. Ohio set a goal for postsecondary attainment because people deserve the opportunity to earn college degrees to move ahead in career pathways that will support them and their families and grow our state's economy. But, the amendment introduced last week would remove such opportunities for hard-working Ohioans who are struggling to transition from low-wage jobs to 21st century careers that will sustain their families and support their communities.

Because so many WGU students are working full-time while gaining the skills and knowledge to increase their future success, they need higher ed options that are feasible within the constraints of their busy lives. Having accredited, affordable, rigorous academic programs accessible to them that align with the skills and knowledge employers are seeking is a win not only for each student but for our entire state.

The amendment in Substitute House Bill 166 that would prohibit Chancellor Gardner from renewing WGU's existing state authorization would be detrimental to our friends and neighbors who are trying to earn degrees to improve their lives when traditional models don't fit their lifestyles or their budgets.

I respectfully encourage you to remove this amendment from House Bill 166 before sending it to the Senate. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on this important matter.