

May 7, 2019

**The Honorable Scott Oelslager, Chair
House Finance Committee
Ohio House of Representatives
77 South High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215-6111**

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Dr. Erinn Nicley. I am a Department Chair and faculty member at Western Governors University (WGU Ohio). I also am a lifelong Ohio citizen.

Dr. Rebecca Watts, Chancellor at WGU Ohio, presented to you last Friday a compelling request for deletion of proposed revisions to Ohio House Bill 166 including lines 10532-10536 and lines 24527-25436 that will adversely affect the 3,176 currently enrolled WGU Ohio students and will reduce economic opportunity for countless future WGU Ohio students across all 88 Ohio counties. Dr. Watts' testimony provides a clear portrait of WGU and our WGU Ohio affiliate as an innovative private, not-for-profit, fully accredited educational institution. For 22 years, WGU has provided a high-quality, life-changing educational opportunity for over 115,000 WGU graduates and an equal number of current students.

As a supplement to Dr. Watts' words, I would like to share my educational and professional journey as a powerful example for why WGU Ohio merits the continued full support from the Government of Ohio and our educational governance institutions. I am a first-generation college graduate. My own higher education journey is the product of deep sacrifices my family made for me. Through five decades of hard industrial manufacturing positions in Dayton, Cincinnati, and Columbus, my father made profound sacrifices to help ensure I earned an Ohio college education. Like all Ohioans, he recognized that a university education would be essential to prepare me for the late 20th and early 21st century global economy. I was deeply fortunate that my family had the capacity to support my traditional Higher Education journey. An Ohio Wesleyan University valedictorian, I continued through to earn my Ph.D. and served my country with the U.S. Foreign Service diplomatic corps.

WGU Ohio is deeply committed to a single mission to provide all Ohioans with the same educational opportunity I so fortunately had thanks to my own family and fellow Ohioans' generosity. When Ronald Reagan, John Kennedy, and other U.S. leaders spoke of America as a "shining city on a hill," they understood that our country – and our state – reached that summit when we provided the educational and economic opportunity that would allow everyone to seize their dreams for a better life for themselves and their families. I have a profound respect for the distinct educational opportunity that WGU – *and only WGU* – affords countless Ohioans throughout our state.

For untold Ohioans who seek to better their lives and their families' lives in 2019, WGU is more than a school. WGU Ohio offers an affordable, flexible, competency-based educational model that is revolutionizing student opportunity in even the remotest corners of our state and helping build the 21st century Ohio workforce that the Governors Executive Workforce Board, former and current Governors of Ohio, and everyone in the General Assembly is so eager to realize for the betterment of our communities and our state. As Ohioans, we must continue to provide the Higher Education innovations and opportunities that will help those long-forgotten Ohioans become active, contributing members of our state and our national economy.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

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