



**State Representative Derek Merrin
District 47**

**House Bill 371 – Sponsor Testimony
Higher Education Committee
November 13th, 2019**

Chair Keller, Vice-Chair Riedel, Ranking Member Ingram, and Higher Education Committee Members thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on House Bill 371. The Forever Buckeye Program extends in-state resident tuition rates to any public or private Ohio high school graduate who leaves our state, but returns to enroll at an Ohio college and establishes residency in Ohio. The program removes a 12-month period of establishing domicile in Ohio before being eligible for in-state tuition rates. In 2018, almost 4,600 students enrolled in the program. If the program did not exist, those students would have had to pay out-of-state tuition rates for their first year. Many students may have not even enrolled in an Ohio institution as a result.

A constituent of mine brought to my attention the Forever Buckeye Program only applies to high school graduates, but not GED or high school equivalency certificate holders in Ohio. This was an unfortunate mistake when the program was established in the state's operating budget FY 2012-2013. HB 371 corrects this error and expands the Forever Buckeye Programs to include students that have earned a GED or high school equivalency certificate.

The Forever Buckeye Program was created to encourage students, who leave Ohio after completing high school, to return for higher education by offering them in-state tuition. Furthermore, I believe the program was meant to address Ohioans who live in close proximity to other states. My district borders the state of Michigan. It is not uncommon for Ohioans living in my district to relocate one-mile due to work, marriage, or other reasons and become Michigan residents. However, many will move back to Ohio, and many desire to attend an Ohio institution, such as the University of Toledo.

The Forever Buckeye Program is an excellent initiative delivering results. By including GED recipients in this program, the program will be stronger. It is important all Ohioans are treated fairly and academic achievements are duly recognized. By extending the eligibility to individuals with a GED or similar certificate, we are encouraging students to start their careers in our state. I appreciate the committee's time and look forward to answering questions members may have.