



Testimony on House Bill 371 – Forever Buckeye Program Expansion

House Higher Education Committee

November 20, 2019

Chairwoman Keller, Vice-Chair Riedel, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the House Higher Education Committee Members, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 371 sponsored by Representative Merrin. I am Jack Hershey, President of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC), which represents the trustees and presidents of all twenty-three of the public two-year institutions throughout the state.

Since FY 2012, the Forever Buckeye program has extended in-state tuition rates to any Ohio high school graduate who leaves the state but returns to enroll in an undergraduate or graduate program at one of our public colleges or universities. Thanks to this popular program, nearly 4,600 students were able to receive in-state tuition immediately upon re-establishing their residency in the state. Last year alone, nearly 500 community college students benefited from these tuition savings - representing a more than 300% increase in the number of Forever Buckeye community college students over the past 5 years.

Extending the Forever Buckeye Program to include GED or high school equivalency certificate holders is consistent with the open access missions of our community colleges. We are proud to provide affordable, flexible and high quality education to all students regardless of class rank, income, or socio-economic background and we are deeply committed to the promise of keeping the door open to ensure all learners can pursue a credential. Because of our low cost and flexible workforce focused program offerings, community colleges tend to be the first choice for many of the so-called “non-traditional” working adult learners.

According to data from the Ohio Department of Higher Education, more than 11,000 students that have earned a GED, or other equivalency, attended one of Ohio’s community colleges last academic year. HB 371 builds upon a number of recent programs that are designed to provide innovative, affordable pathways to encourage more students to earn a postsecondary degree including the Ohio GI Promise, Forever Buckeye, and the Guaranteed Transfer Pathways programs.

This bill is yet another smart strategy to help Ohio meet its “Complete to Compete” workforce readiness goal of having 65% of all adults with some type of postsecondary certificate, credential, or degree. If Ohio is going to meet this workforce readiness attainment goal, we must continue to identify smart, innovative policies targeted toward attracting more working adult learners back to a community college to pursue a postsecondary education.

By expanding the Forever Buckeye program to include GED or other certificate recipients, HB 371 will encourage more adults who return to Ohio, to also hopefully enroll in college, move successfully into a career, and raise their family right here in the Buckeye state. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.