



**Representative Mary Lightbody
19th House District**

**Testimony to the House Higher Education Committee
House Bill 603 <> May 12, 2020
Mary Lightbody, Ph.D.**

Chairman Keller, Vice Chair Riedel, Ranking Member Ingram, and fellow members of the Higher Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify in support of House Bill 603, which would require the Chancellor of Higher Education to waive interest rates and suspend payments on state student loan programs for up to sixty days, and to conduct a study to assist institutions of higher education and students during the COVID-19 outbreak. This would impact the OhioMeansJobs Workforce Development Revolving Loan Program and the Nurse Education Assistance Relief Program. This action would parallel what has been done by the office of Federal Student Aid for federally held student loans.

The purpose of this legislation is to take immediate action to provide financial support to those who have attended an institution of Higher Education in Ohio and having graduated, are now in the midst of our health emergency struggling to pay off their loans. The bill will also allow us to plan for future support to our higher education institutions as they plan for an ever-evolving situation.

Each and every one of our offices has reached a flood of calls in the nine weeks since Governor DeWine signed the executive order declaring a State of Emergency due to COVID-19. Our communities have a vast arrays of worries and anxieties about the health and wellness of their families, financial insecurities, and access to healthcare. The number of Ohioans on unemployment has now exceeded 1,120,000, and among them are residents who have state education loans. The concerns we are trying to help resolve will take different resources and action from our legislative body and our federal counterparts.

The best steps we can take now as a legislative body is prepare ourselves to provide support. The most effective way to do this is to listen to the experts and those who guide the policy in our educational systems. This piece of legislation asks for Ohio's Chancellor of Higher Education to conduct a study to determine ways to offer relief and assistance to institutions of higher education and students in higher education during the COVID-19 outbreak. The bill also includes an emergency clause to allow the bill to go into immediate effect and requires legislative recommendations. This will allows us to act in the best interests of the higher education institutions to support the student bodies.

Our students are in a truly unprecedented time in their lives and facing toward an uncertain future. As you know I teach students who are in the teacher education program at The Ohio State University-Newark Campus. Many of the students who attend the regional campuses of Ohio State are first generation college students and a high percentage of our students pay their own way through college. The federal and state loans they receive allow them to pursue a



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college degree and licensure for their careers, yet it can take them many years to pay off the loans. Early career teachers invest in their own classroom libraries, provide many educational materials for their students, and are relatively low on the pay scale.

This legislation will help those who have graduated and face harsh budget challenges during this health crisis. The truth is that no one has any idea what is coming next—whether it is six weeks and six months from now. It is to help others like them that Representative Ingram and I ask you to consider this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this important piece of legislation. After Representative Ingram's testimony, I know that she and I would be happy to answer any questions the committee members may have.