



**May 26, 2020**

**Ohio House of Representatives Higher Education Committee**

**Chair Candice Keller**

**Beth Lear, Vice President of Government Affairs Associated Builders and Contractors of Ohio**

## **SB 181 – Proponent Testimony**

Chair Keller, Vice Chair Riedel, Ranking Member Ingram and Representatives,

I am Beth Lear, Vice President of Government Affairs for Ohio's Associated Builders and Contractors. ABC of Ohio and our members proudly and strongly support Senate Bill 181, the "workforce-education partnership program," as a win-win-win-win proposal.

Win #1: This is a win for businesses, all businesses, although I speak specifically for the construction industry.

The skilled trades have been hemorrhaging workers for years as a large percentage of the electricians, HVAC technicians, plumbers, carpenters and masons are baby boomers and retiring. Compounding the problem is the push by K-12 and the universities to move as many students as possible into 4-year university programs, steering them away from skilled trades.<sup>1</sup>

We are interested in supporting this because it appears customizable to allow us to work with universities to create degrees that support our business, and our apprenticeship programs will be used by the school to provide credit for the student.

The construction industry is ready, willing and able to participate in the program being created in SB 181, and would greatly benefit from students working in the industry while simultaneously earning their degree in a construction-related field.

Win #2: Higher Education also wins since it will develop closer ties to the local business community and be better positioned to move graduating students into full-time careers following graduation. Providing flexible degree programs and helping students work their way through college with no loans to repay could also result in an immediate donor corps ready and willing to support the university that was so helpful to them.

Win #3: The community is also a winner since this program will encourage graduates to stay in the area to work in their new, full-time, good-paying positions following graduation. The



community will also benefit from new taxpayers with more money to spend since they will not be constrained by massive student loan debt.

Win #4: Students are the biggest winners. For far too many higher education graduates – those that make it to graduation – finding a job in their degree field that pays enough to live as an adult is difficult. In February, *Forbes* revealed<sup>2</sup> student loan debt has reached a staggering \$1.56 trillion, averaging nearly \$30,000 per student.

SB 181 allows participating collegians to graduate debt-free. Not only is a student provided with a job during school, similar to a work-study program, but the school will be responsible for helping find grants to fund their education and the businesses will provide the rest. On top of that, the bill requires students be offered housing stipends. The opportunity to earn a paycheck, pursue a degree and gain life skills with no debt following graduation is an incredible incentive to graduate and work hard.

So as you can see, SB 181 is a win-win-win-win for businesses, universities, communities and students. The only way to make it better would be to include two-year schools in the mix.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.news5cleveland.com/news/local-news/cleveland-metro/shortage-of-skilled-labor-could-mean-backlog-higher-costs-for-you>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/zackfriedman/2020/02/03/student-loan-debt-statistics/#53b5d014281f>