

House Finance Higher Education Committee
Ohio Student Association and Students for Educational Equity

Date: April 11, 2019

Thomas Pope: Good afternoon Chairman Carfagna, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the Finance Higher Education Committee. Thank you for the chance to discuss the upcoming budget and the opportunities to invest in high-quality, accessible higher education for all. My name is Thomas Pope, and I'm a student at the Moritz College of Law. Standing before you is an alliance of high school, college, and graduate students who have experienced the benefits of financial aid, but have also seen how lack of access to aid can lock young people out of the American Dream. We applaud the budget's increase to SSI and the addition of \$6 million dollars in OCOG grants for our peers at community colleges. However, our analysis of this budget suggests that thousands of potential learners will be left out of this budget as it stands. In the papers before you, you'll see proposals to tie the State's Share of Instruction to the cost of living, expand OCOG grants to more community college students and those who fall between the cracks of the funding formula, and also increase targeted grants for students most at risk of dropping out. We feel that these programs can be funded by tightening the pass-through entity tax loopholes that slipped into past budgets, and you can read all about that in our report. But we are not here just to talk about policy.

Griffin Cole: Some of you went to college when a summer job could cover the cost of tuition. We know of these rosy days only through our parents and grandparents, if they went to college. My name is Griffin Cole, and I'm a student at Ohio state, where many of my peers work two to three jobs and *still* graduate with student loans that keep us from buying homes, starting families, and pursuing the careers of our dreams. Many of us exist in the gap between those who can afford to pay for college easily and those who can get financial aid. Jolie Rapavy has experienced this directly and can share her experience.

Jolie Rapavy: "Good morning. My name is Jolie Rapavy, and I'm a senior at _____ school. I grew up in Dublin, Ohio where a lot of kids and their parents can afford to go to any college of their choice without even thinking about the cost. My family is not poor but we're not rich either. My mom is a small business owner, my dad works two jobs, and I've been working since I was 15. When we started to apply for financial aid we realized how difficult it is to come up with an answer for our yearly income. As my mom's business grows and shrinks, so does the money. We

did not qualify for any financial aid benefits because we were just above the cap that determines whether we need it or not. I know I will now have to work twice as hard to pay my way through college even though the possibility of that aid was just slightly out of reach. *This gap exists partially because the formula for deciding if a student will get Ohio financial aid cuts off students with more than a \$2,000 in Expected Family Contribution – less than half of the amount that the Pell Grant uses to determine if a student needs aid. By increasing the OCOG cap to the \$5,000 Expected Family Contribution of Pell, thousands of middle class students would be able to receive financial aid instead of falling in the cracks. But our peers are not just falling through the cracks because of tuition.*

Sam Evans: *Good afternoon. My name is Sam Evans and I'm a freshman at the Ohio State University. I have seen how the price of room, board, books, and healthcare adds financial burdens that are not covered under the current system. For many students including myself, the stress of paying for college and other personal finances piles on top the stressors of simply being a college student. I have a twin sister also studying at OSU. To cover our tuition, my family pays roughly 45% of our household income directly to Ohio State. Each of these last two semesters I have paid a \$186 fee which covers the Counselling and Consultation Services which OSU offers. Last semester when I tried to access these services I was scheduled two weeks out to get a consultation over the phone to be told the earliest I could be considered for an appointment was the start of the next this semester. Because of the stress on university mental health system, I am paying for a benefit that I will not actually get to use, and have started paying out of pocket for mental health services. For many students living on the margins, these kinds of expenses, whether it's a car breaking down or an unexpected mental health emergency, can mean the difference between continuing with school or dropping out. We believe that we can tackle Ohio's drop out rate by expanding the targeted grants that help students who face the highest financial challenges. For example, we can expand programs like Ohio CARES that provide grants for students who face financial emergencies that threaten their enrollment status. We can also make it possible for OCOG funds to be used for expenses like room, board, and transportation. This reform would be immensely helpful for our peers at places like Columbus State Community College, where Ohio's last-dollar funding locks students out from the chance at financial aid. Our friends who attend community colleges and regional campuses deserve access to the same financial opportunities as we have.*

Griffin Cole: As an Ohio State student who is fortunate enough to have received a Land Grant Scholarship from Ohio State, I know the world of difference financial aid makes in the life of a student. Unlike many of my fellow classmates, I am able to focus on my studies with a greater peace of mind knowing that my education is financed. My future seems open. The prospect of graduating from Ohio State without debt has left me hopeful in what I can achieve after graduation. For instance, the possibility of continuing my education or finding my dream career seems real. *This dream is a reality because someone invested in me. What could be possible if our state invested in all students the way we invest in some? In terms of the state's support for financial aid, we are still living in 2009, when Ohio slashed state financial aid by more than half. We can return Ohio to a place where all can learn and prosper by solidifying a yearly increase to the state's share of instruction. Pegging the State's Share of Instruction to an automatic annual cost-of-living adjustment would ensure long term sustainability that makes it possible for students like me to succeed.*

Thomas Pope: All told, the reforms we have suggested would come to roughly \$150 million in fiscal year 2020. The money for those reforms is right in front of us: Ohio is losing \$1 billion per year because of tax exemptions to pass-through entities that create few jobs for Ohioans. Closing loopholes like this could make it possible for us to invest in high-quality education for years to come. The change is possible. Our question to the committee is this: will Ohio continue to live in 2009? Or will we invest in our future and invest in higher education. Thank you for your time.