

Testimony

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Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education
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Good morning, Chairman Carfagna, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education.

I appreciate the ability to talk about strengthening Ohio's only need-based financial aid program, known as the Ohio College Opportunity Grant and often referred to as "OCO," for future generations of students in our state. The University of Dayton is focused squarely on increasing accessibility and affordability for students from every zip code, and the vitality of the OCOG program is crucial.

I'm grateful to you, Mr. Chairman, for visiting the University of Dayton campus in March to meet with administrative leaders and students as part of your listening tour around the state. We appreciate your interest in strengthening higher education in our state — and in our collective efforts to prepare more students for future success in work and life.

For those on the committee who may not be familiar with the University of Dayton, UD enrolls more undergraduate students than any other independent universities in Ohio. The University was founded in 1850 by the Society of Mary, more commonly known as the Marianists, a Roman Catholic teaching order that prizes educating the "whole student" in a community of support and challenge. We're a highly residential university with a learning and living environment that extends over more than 400 acres on the outskirts of downtown Dayton.

In all, we enroll more than 11,000 undergraduate, graduate, and law students. Our undergraduate first-to-second year retention rate has risen to 91 percent, and our six-year graduation rate is about 83 percent. Among the largest four-year private universities with undergraduate enrollments over 8,000, we expect to rank among the top 15 in the country for student completion. When considering all public and private universities of this size, we rank in the top 40. Virtually all — approximately 97 percent — of recent UD graduates with bachelor degrees report being employed, enrolled in graduate school, or participating in a service program within six months of graduation.

In addition, the University of Dayton is a pre-eminent research university. Last fiscal year, we performed a record \$150 million in sponsored research, much with Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and a number of projects in collaboration with other research universities in the state. No other university in the nation performs more federally sponsored materials research, and we rank ninth nationally in total research expenditures among private four-year American universities that do not have medical schools.

I'm here today to offer the University of Dayton's strong support for the Ohio College Opportunity Grant. Its long-term viability is critical to our efforts to enroll more talented low- and moderate-income students and graduate them well-prepared for jobs that advance Ohio's economy.

Approximately 368 University of Dayton students this academic year are receiving slightly more than \$1 million — \$1,005,148, to be precise — in Ohio College Opportunity Grants. The number

of grants awarded has risen over the last three years, from 294 students receiving more than \$761,000 in grants in 2017 to 318 students benefitting from more than \$902,000 in OCOG funding in 2018. Like our counterparts in Ohio higher education, we're extremely grateful for these grants, which help make a college education a reality for a growing number of students in our state.

We welcome the increased funding in this year's state budget for the program, but we also support additional future funding to maintain the program's long-term viability. It's essential for the future of our state.

As you know, the Ohio College Opportunity Grant is now Ohio's only need-based aid program, and it currently receives less funding than need-based aid programs did 20 years ago. Along with the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Ohio, the University of Dayton supports returning OCOG to its original design, including increasing annual funding and specifying grant award amounts in statute.

The Ohio College Opportunity Grant supports a national imperative to expand opportunity for traditionally underrepresented students, especially first-generation, low-income, and students of color. The University of Dayton invests a considerable amount in financial aid to maximize the state's investment in the OCOG program to make a college education affordable for the neediest students. OCOG grants help our state's colleges and universities graduate more students — graduates who will use their degrees to shape Ohio's 21st century economy and create a better future for their families.

Ohio State University President Michael Drake and I currently serve on the steering committee of the *American Talent Initiative*, a collaborative of more than 100 high-graduation-rate colleges and universities who are working to graduate an additional 50,000 low- and middle-income students from our institutions by 2025. Other Ohio member institutions include Case Western, the College of Wooster, Denison, and Kenyon.

This initiative is seeing early success as evidenced by an increase in enrollment of 7,291 Pell Grant-eligible students — or 3.5 percent — across partner universities and colleges, according to a December 2018 ATI report. That progress report speaks well of UD's efforts, too. Last fall, the University of Dayton enrolled a record number of students from underrepresented populations, with more than 15 percent of the first-year class eligible for the federal Pell grant.

Increasing socio-economic diversity is not an easy task, particularly for universities with modest endowments and tuition-dependent operating budgets. That's why the Ohio College Opportunity Grant is so important. As fewer students comprise the traditional college-age pipeline and a greater share of those students are from first-generation college-going families or historically underrepresented backgrounds, many colleges are wrestling with how to create a financially sustainable model for enrolling and graduating talented students. You simply cannot talk about expanding opportunity without increasing need-based financial aid over the long term.

The University of Dayton is taking other steps, too, to make a college degree accessible. I'd like to share with you our emerging model, parts of which are being replicated by other universities.

Under our four-year "fixed net tuition plan," which has received national attention, a student's scholarships and grants increase each year to offset any tuition increases. We've eliminated ALL

FEES and given every student a \$4,000 textbook scholarship and a \$3,000 study-abroad scholarship. The result? Record retention and graduation rates — and no surprises for cost-conscious families, who are now borrowing 28 percent less than they were prior to this plan being instituted. Other universities in the state, including Ohio University, The Ohio State University, University of Toledo and Wright State University, are now offering locked-in tuition guarantees. Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine supports all public universities following suit by adopting guaranteed tuition rates.

In another effort to increase accessibility, the University of Dayton has introduced a “Flyer Promise” program, which aims to enroll 50 additional Pell-eligible students each year and remove financial barriers for high-achieving, highly motivated students from partner high schools. Every student in the first cohort of Flyer Promise Scholars returned for the sophomore year, which affirms that there is no talent gap — only an opportunity gap. These students, with high financial need and soaring dreams, are worthy recipients of the Ohio College Opportunity Grant.

We are also making a strategic effort to enroll, support, and graduate more veterans. Veterans typically outperform traditional students in the classroom, and more than two-thirds nationally do not hold a bachelor’s degree.

Finally, the UD Sinclair Academy, now in its third year, is opening doors for students from various racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds, including many first-generation college students — at half the cost of a traditional four-year degree *even before* any financial awards are provided. For the first two years, students accepted into the UD Sinclair Academy pay one of the lowest tuition rates in Ohio at one of the top community colleges, saving approximately \$50,000. Once they earn their associate’s degrees, these students seamlessly embark on their junior year at the University of Dayton, with their net tuition at the rate in effect when they entered the Academy. And these students are UD and Sinclair Community College students from day one, as proven by current Academy students studying at Sinclair and also marching in our band or conducting research with one of our professors before they even take their first class on our campus.

Our partnership with Sinclair Community College is expanding through innovations such as a new bachelor in science nursing degree that provides a similar affordable pathway to a four-year credential.

Let’s work together to make the promise of higher education a viable option for every talented student in the state who desires a college degree, no matter their zip code, no matter their family’s income level.

The Ohio College Opportunity Grant does just that. It opens the door to higher education for more students, particularly first-generation college students. It offers a pathway to the kinds of in-demand careers that will propel Ohio’s economy. It’s a long-term investment in the vitality of our state.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to offer my reflections on this issue. We stand ready to be a resource to you in expanding opportunity for Ohio students and shaping the economy of the future in our state. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.