



Stark State COLLEGE

Office of the President

Senate Bill 109 Proponent Testimony
Para M. Jones, Ph.D., President, Stark State College
Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Chairman Matt Dolan
October 8, 2019

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Para Jones, and I serve as President of Stark State College. I also have the privilege of serving on the Governor's Executive Workforce Board. I am honored to be here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 109, sponsored by Senator Kirk Schuring, which would establish the Workforce Scholarship Program and tax credits for students pursuing education and training leading to in-demand careers and tax credits for businesses seeking to fill in-demand jobs.

Stark State College is the fourth-largest of the community and technical colleges serving Ohio students. We provide quality, affordable associate degree and certificate programs to 15,000 students annually in Stark, Summit and surrounding counties. These programs are in high-demand fields such as manufacturing, engineering technology and construction; allied health and nursing; information technology; and more.

Chairman Dolan and members of the committee, you are well aware of Ohio's urgent need to fill in-demand jobs:

- According to JobsOhio, TeamNEO, U.S. Department of Labor and economic development professionals and businesses, the nation's economy and Ohio's economy are facing an historical mismatch, or "skills gap." The biggest gap is in middle-skills jobs in manufacturing, health care, information technology (IT) and business. These middle-skill, middle-income jobs have starting salaries of \$40,000 to \$70,000, and require some postsecondary education, but not necessarily a degree. These skills gaps are projected to get worse as Baby Boomers continue to retire in record numbers.
- The Ohio Chamber of Commerce's 2018 report, entitled *Ohio BOLD: A Blueprint for Accelerating the Innovation Economy*, discusses the need to develop, retain and attract talent that aligns with industry needs. The report recommends that businesses partner with educational institutions to develop new school-to-work models to serve industry, including apprenticeships and work-based learning. It also recommends financial incentives for Ohio graduates with needed skill sets.

- In Stark and Summit counties alone, there will be 300,000 middle-skills jobs open between now and 2023. Faculty, staff and I meet daily with employers who are desperate to fill these middle-skills jobs in advanced manufacturing, industrial technology, welding, HVAC-R, construction trades, entry-level IT, cybersecurity, allied health, nursing and more.

Like other community colleges across the state, Stark State has excellent educational and training programs, K-12 and employer partnerships to address in-demand jobs. But we do not have enough students pursuing education that will lead to these critical Ohio careers.

We support Sen. Schuring’s SB109 because it provides scholarships and tax credits to “incentivize” students to pursue certificates and degrees that lead to in-demand careers. We believe these scholarships will help close these critical workforce gaps, particularly when coupled with employer internships and tangible career opportunities upon graduation.

We believe that Senate Bill 109’s workforce scholarships for students and tax credits for employers will incentivize education and workforce alignment, meet the needs of students and employers and advance our state’s economy. Many other states, including Kentucky, South Carolina, Arizona, Indiana and Connecticut, successfully use tax incentives to assist employers in hiring and training new and incumbent workers.

SB109 aligns with the economic development plans of Northeast Ohio and the communities in Stark State College’s service area, which have identified skills gaps in key industry sectors as a critical economic and social issue. SB 109 addresses the education/workforce mismatch of “people without jobs” and “jobs without people.”

SB109 provides financial incentives to strengthen the education-to-career pathways we have established with our K-12 partners and employers. For example:

- CDL (Commercial Drivers License) – The shortage of truck drivers is crippling business in the region, state and nation. CDL is a high-cost, short-term certificate program that provides completers with starting salaries of \$70,000 and higher per year. With a few years of experience, a CDL driver can earn \$100,000+. Federal PELL grants cover a small portion of the \$6,500 cost of CDL training. SB109 student scholarships are a perfect fit for CDL.
- Our innovative “Grow with Us” initiative – Employers partner with Stark State to “upskill” incumbent, entry-level workers. Stark State would leverage SB109 scholarships to expand and enhance this program, especially for small and mid-sized employers.
- “Learn to Earn” for high school students – This employer-driven program provides College Credit Plus pathways to in-demand careers for high school students. Thanks to Stark State’s excellent CCP partnerships with K-12 schools throughout the region and state, high school students earn tuition-free college credit in in-demand fields. SB109 scholarships will enable Learn to Earn students to continue and complete their certificates and degrees debt-free after they graduate from high school.

- “Learn to Earn” for college students – We expanded our Learn to Earn program to Stark State students due to employer need and demand. SB109 scholarships would be an incentive for students to pursue educational and training programs in high-demand fields.

SB109 will benefit Ohio’s citizens, employers and communities by providing:

- Citizens/students: Debt-free college certificates and degrees in high-demand fields with a clear path to a career and the opportunity to continue learning and earning.
- Employers: Educated and trained employees to help their companies expand and grow.
- Communities, regions and State of Ohio: A stronger economy, thanks to a more educated population, workforce and education alignment, successful businesses and organizations positioned for current and future growth and success.

In closing, Chairman Dolan and members of the committee thank you for allowing me to testify today. Thank you for your consideration and favorable support of SB109. I will be happy to answer any questions the committee may have at this time.