

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
SENATE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, MAY 8, 2019

SUBMITTED BY
WESTERN GOVERNORS UNIVERSITY
Advisory Board Member Dan Molina

Thank you, Chairwoman Kunze, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee for the opportunity to speak with you today.

I am Dan Molina, from Loveland, Ohio. I am President and CEO of CenterGrid, a Cloud Solutions company in Hamilton, Ohio. I serve as Vice Chairperson for the Ohio Commission on Hispanic-Latino Affairs, Chair-Elect of for the Cincinnati Youth Collaborative, Board Secretary and Chair of Governance for Bethesda Inc., and as a member of the TriHealth Quality Assessment and Total Quality Management Committee. I earned both my Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and Master of Business Administration degrees at the University of Dayton.

Since 2018 I have been a member of the Advisory Board for Western Governors University (WGU) Ohio, providing guidance and counsel to the university. I bring the voice of the Ohio business community, offer my insights related to talent needs in the information technology sector, and voice my individual perspectives as the son of Cuban immigrants, one of whom went on to serve in the United States Army.

Along with my wife and three children, our family's commitment to and pride in Ohio are deep. Both of my parents received the Ohio Governor's Distinguished Hispanic Ohioan Awards. My mom and my dad both earned their college degrees while working full-time. Like so many, traditional college was not an option for either of them, which is one of many reasons I am so passionate about making sure that regardless of their circumstances everyone in Ohio gets a shot to build a strong future.

Just two weeks ago I had the opportunity to personally congratulate WGU graduates as they crossed the commencement stage. As I looked in their eyes, their sense of accomplishment and hope for a brighter future welled up as their spouses, their children, and their parents came together to shout their pride from the audience. That was a moment that they—and I—will always remember.

It was fitting that WGU's commencement ceremony took place on the beautiful campus of the University of Cincinnati (UC), our gracious host for the day. WGU is honored to be part of the excellent higher education community in this state, knowing that the higher education needs of Ohioans are as diverse and varied as the communities that make up our beautiful state. Just one week after WGU's commencement, the University of Cincinnati held seven separate commencement ceremonies, each celebrating the achievements of students with different majors at different stages of their lifelong learning and growth.

I applaud UC's graduates and every individual in Ohio who celebrated their hard work and dedication by walking across a commencement stage in our community colleges, public universities, and private universities. Commencement celebrations are a beginning for each of them and for us. I hope you share in the pride I feel for our friends and neighbors as they rejoice in the skills and knowledge they have gained to move into a successful future.

Without question, each graduate's path is unique. We wouldn't want it any other way. In the state where the first university in the Northwest Territory was formed—Ohio University—we honor the diversity of families from beautiful Appalachia and the lush farmland of Northwest Ohio to the vibrant urban hubs of beautiful Ohio. A state as diverse as Ohio requires a comprehensive array of learning and growth opportunities for its citizens.

WGU's online, competency-based programs offer an option for people challenged by barriers of geographic distance and challenging work and life schedules. For many of us, life is not a seamless

journey. Nearly one million of our fellow Ohioans have some college but no degree. Along the way, we hit bumps in the road. These challenges reflect an interrupted journey for individuals, families, and for our shared dreams and hopes for the future.

In examining Ohio's unique resources, our nation's leading economists have identified that in-demand careers in the 21st century will require a workforce in Ohio that includes 65 percent of adults age 25 to 64 holding a meaningful postsecondary credential that will advance their careers and fortify our workforce.

Through expanded opportunities for affordable, accredited, high quality postsecondary education, more Ohioans will attain postsecondary credentials of value that enhance their career pathways and strengthen their abilities to support themselves and their families. Earning these credentials demonstrates that graduates have gained the knowledge and skills for in-demand careers that feed the future economic prosperity of our state.

Through WGU's certificate of authorization in Ohio, eligible WGU students participate in the Ohio College Opportunity Grant, the War Orphan Scholarship, the Ohio National Guard and Reserve Scholarship and the Ohio Nursing Education Loan Assistance Program. Our taxpayers' investment in the future success of Ohioans yields nurses, teachers, cybersecurity professionals, and business leaders that strengthen the future of our state.

Standing alongside the students of Ohio's other excellent colleges and universities, we all are focused on student success. Affordability and collaboration are at the heart of WGU's partnership with the Ohio Association of Community Colleges, which assures community college graduates a seamless transfer of credit to WGU toward completion of a bachelor's degree.

We also guard against financial burdens that would threaten the long-term future of our graduates. WGU's Responsible Borrowing Initiative (RBI) requires that all WGU students who apply for financial aid complete a personalized Financial Aid Plan, which recommends that students borrow only their "unmet direct costs"—tuition and fees minus any grants or scholarships. WGU's RBI is producing the desired results. Since 2013, the average borrowing per year per WGU student (of those who borrow) has decreased by more than 40 percent, to an average of \$3,250 per year. Between July 2013 and June 2016, the average amount borrowed per WGU student decreased by 41 percent - a total savings of \$400 million.

The average time for a WGU student to earn a bachelor's degree is less than three years, at an average cost to the student of approximately \$16,000. This investment produces great returns quickly after graduation with an average increase in annual salary of \$12,500 within two years of graduation. WGU operates as a private, nonprofit university that is self-sustaining on per-student tuition of just over \$7,000 per year. For Ohio communities, this degree of affordability makes it possible for teachers, nurses, and other professionals to advance their knowledge and skills without taking on debt that would force them to leave their communities to seek higher salaries in larger markets.

WGU Ohio is committed to quality, affordability, and results. Our work is supported through our employer and community college partnerships as well as the expertise of an advisory board of Ohio leaders in business, K-12 education, information technology, and community colleges. These advisors

assure that we understand the education-to-workforce needs throughout the regions and economic sectors in our state. We are grateful for their leadership and expertise.

The Ohio Senate received language in the House of Representatives' Substitute version of HB 166 that would harm Ohioans by prohibiting the Ohio Chancellor of Higher Education from granting or renewing recognition of WGU Ohio. This action would render Ohioans enrolled at WGU ineligible to receive the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG), the Ohio War Orphans Scholarship, the Ohio National Guard and Reserve Scholarship, as well as loans from the Nurse Education Assistance Loan Program (NEALP). Substitute HB 166 also would prevent WGU from collaborating with other colleges and universities in the state to scale up best practices for competency-based education to deepen and accelerate student success.

Like you, I hope that my story, my mission and God-willing, my legacy will be that everyone gets a chance to improve their reality along with that of their family and community.

Today I ask you to act with courage on behalf of hard-working, motivated Ohioans to eliminate the amendments to HB166 that would remove support for Ohioans pursuing goals that will fortify our shared future and would impede collaboration for innovation and modernization of the state's higher education offerings.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and I welcome any questions you may have.