

**Testimony before the Ohio Senate Finance – Higher Education Subcommittee
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Chairman Gardner, Vice Chair Cafaro, and members of the Finance-Higher Education subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on college affordability and workforce skills. And thank you for the support you've given to higher education generally, and community colleges specifically. I am David Harrison, President of Columbus State Community College.

Columbus State has grown into one of the largest and most comprehensive colleges in Ohio serving students from more than 130 countries and all 88 Ohio counties. Columbus State contributes nearly a billion dollars in regional economic impact, and the College has a proven record as both a sound investment and a conscientious steward of taxpayer and tuition dollars. We do this while maintaining our commitment to expanding access to an affordable, high-quality education for the emerging, incumbent, and transitional workforce.

There has been much attention about the rising cost of college and alarming levels of student debt. Elected officials at both the federal and state levels have made policy recommendations that put community colleges in a leadership role. This confidence is well placed. Community colleges are purpose built to address two of Ohio's most urgent challenges: rising student debt and unmet workforce needs.

Community Colleges are the Answer to College Affordability

While much of the attention on costs is focused on higher education generally, community colleges and universities play distinctly different roles, and have substantially different business models. Community colleges are committed to access. We are inclusive, not exclusive. Our open admission policies serve students of all ages and backgrounds. First-generation students,

low-income students, students of color, adults in transition, and returning veterans thrive in our environment; and, they do so with very little debt.

Current student debt is a startling figure. Total student debt now exceeds the trillion-dollar mark. The average debt of bachelor's degree holders is almost \$30,000, and it takes those graduates an average of 14 years to pay off those loans. Students who are borrowing the most money in many cases are those who can afford it the least.

Ohio ranks in the bottom fifth in the U.S both in terms of the number of students who graduate with debt, and in the amount of debt they take on. States with strong 2+2 policies score much better on both measures. Florida, for example, scores in the top fifth in the U.S. on both measures, and their community college system leads the nation in completion rates as a result of strong 2+2 state policy. The average debt load of Ohio graduates is nearly \$30,000; Florida's average is \$10,000 less.

Columbus State has established its own regional 2+2 policy through a program called Preferred Pathway. Through Columbus State's deep partnerships with universities, we offer students and families substantial savings on the bachelor's degree. Four years ago we partnered with The Ohio State University to provide guaranteed admission to OSU for our graduates, and created deeper alignment of curriculum, advising, and other processes. Soon other universities including Ohio University, Miami, Capital, Franklin, Ohio Dominican, Ohio Wesleyan, and Otterbein joined the partnership.

At Columbus State, the Preferred Pathway Partnerships save students between 30-45% on their tuition expenses. That's a savings of between \$12,000 and \$75,000 dollars, depending on the university. We can expect these savings to grow even more for students who take advantage of both College Credit Plus and Preferred Pathway. For students who graduate with 30 credit

hours through College Credit Plus, they would save 62-69% on their tuition; between \$25,000 and \$117,300, depending on the university.

	With Columbus State Partnership	Without Columbus State Partnership	Savings to Families	Percentage Saved
Ohio State University	\$28,230	\$40,148	\$11,981	30%
Ohio University	\$31,252	\$46,192	\$14,940	32%
Miami University	\$35,222	\$54,132	\$18,910	35%
Franklin University	\$35,996	\$55,680	\$19,684	35%
Ohio Dominican	\$66,020	\$115,728	\$49,708	43%
Otterbein University	\$71,004	\$125,696	\$54,692	44%
Capital University	\$72,136	\$127,960	\$55,824	44%
Ohio Wesleyan	\$91,999	\$167,680	\$75,684	45%

Note: Tuition only. Student housing, living expenses, textbook costs, and program & variable fees are additional. Tuition discounting or scholarships not included in this analysis.

Adding to the student debt complexity and financial burden is the fact that these figures do not include student housing, living expenses, textbook costs, and additional variable program fees. Room and board on average will cost families an additional \$11,547 a year, in some cases surpassing the cost of annual tuition. And students are required to live on campus two or more years as residential students. This is an important distinction to consider when it comes to discussing college affordability.

Universities are eager to partner with Columbus State because our students do very well when they transfer. According to the National Student Clearing House, of the students who followed a 2+2 pathway to a bachelor’s degree, 74% were successful. Of those who started at a university, only 63% were successful. Earning the associate degree before transferring is an important factor in bachelor’s degree completion. The four-year graduation rate for Columbus

State students who transferred to Ohio State after earning their associate degree is 82%, compared with 66% for those who transferred prior to earning the associate degree.

Community colleges and universities have vastly different cost structures. As noted by Ohio Association of Community Colleges President, Jack Hershey, during his testimony in February to the Ohio House Higher Education Subcommittee on Finance and Appropriations, he spotlighted Columbus State's overall spending as a measure of our commitment to keeping overall costs low. In 2002, Columbus State and the University of Toledo were both open access colleges, and both served about 22,000 students. In the decade that followed, Columbus State's enrollment grew by 8,600 students, while the University of Toledo's enrollment grew by only 600. Despite the influx of students at Columbus State, the total cost of instruction per student only went up \$1,100; however, at the University of Toledo it went up \$4,340.

Columbus State has an impressive track record of ensuring affordability for students, and is a state leader in controlling costs.

- Our tuition is:
 - 9.0% below the Ohio community college average rate/SCH
 - 12.4% below Ohio non-levy community college average rate/SCH
 - 34.6% below Ohio community college highest rate/SCH
 - 31.7% (over \$43 per credit hour) below any college in our region
- We held tuition flat for 6 ½ years, foregoing nearly \$30,000,000 in tuition revenue.
- We have the lowest in-state tuition of any non-levy community college in Ohio; third lowest in-state tuition of all community colleges.
- From 2008-12, cost of tuition at Columbus State dropped by nearly 8% when adjusted for inflation. During this same period, tuition at Ohio universities increased nearly 25%.
- We've aggressively reduced textbook costs, saving students nearly \$1,500,000 in just 18 months.

- As others have established and increased a variety of fees for technology and other infrastructure needs, Columbus State has not passed such fees on to students.

Associate Degree Attainment Solves the Workforce Imbalance

An important factor in affordability is the ability for graduates to get a job making a good salary with a growth-oriented career path. Demand for associate degree graduates has grown 3 times the rate as that of the bachelor's degree. Harvard University predicts that there will be an overwhelming majority of jobs that require technical skills or associate degree level preparation, while only 33% of jobs will require a bachelor's degree.

We are seeing these same projections locally. In the recent JPMorgan Chase New Skills at Work report on Columbus, it stated that currently there are 270,000 high-wage, focused-skill jobs in Columbus that require an associate degree. The report projected these jobs to grow by 10,000 every year.

To meet this need, Columbus State is the architect of a regional strategy with the goal of having 60% of adults hold a postsecondary credential by 2025. Through this consortium, known as the Central Ohio Compact, Columbus State has partnered with school districts throughout the region to establish career pathways beginning in grade 9 and leading to the associate degree (9-14 pathways) in fields such as information technology, healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and logistics. Through College Credit Plus, students can earn a postsecondary certificate while still in high school on their way to an associate degree. In addition to Chase, employer partners include AEP, Cardinal Health, Nationwide Children's, and Honda of America.

High paying jobs await graduates of these programs. In some fields, graduates with associate degrees earn \$11,000 more on average their first year after graduation than bachelor's degree graduates. Nationally over 29 million jobs paying \$35,000 to \$75,000 a year require an associate degree or professional certificate.

In conclusion, Ohio is fortunate to have an enviable collection of assets in its higher education system – both universities and community colleges. Community colleges are teaching colleges with an emphasis firmly on student learning, economic growth, and the development of employable skills. Better utilization of community colleges in bachelor’s degree education would reduce costs for students and families. And the strong relationship between community colleges and employers is a critical factor in closing the state’s skills gap. Columbus State and Ohio’s community colleges stand ready to help all of Ohio’s students reach their goals.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you on this important topic. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.