

COLLINS CAREER CENTER



Testimony on Proposed Ohio Technical Center Degree Program for Underserved Ohio Region

Senate Finance Higher Education Subcommittee – March 20, 2015
Steve Dodgion, Superintendent of Collins Career Center

Chair Gardner, Vice Chair Cafaro, and members of the Senate Finance Higher Education Subcommittee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the educational and employment needs in underserved areas of Ohio.

I serve as Superintendent of the Collins Career. Collins is located in Lawrence County, the southernmost tip of the state. Over time, we have developed excellent adult education program, or Ohio technical center, that serves approximately 600 students per year in fifteen different fields.

We are unique among Ohio technical centers in providing programs in sonography, radiologic tech (or "rad tech") and respiratory therapy. These programs have been extremely successful, with completion and job placement rates that routinely exceed 90%. There is high local demand in our Appalachian region for skilled medical employees in these fields, and graduates taking entry-level positions typically earn **\$40,000 per year or more**. Despite the high demand, there are no comparable Ohio programs available within a one hour drive of our campus.

Presently, Collins partners with out-of-state institutions to provide associate degrees for its sonography, rad tech, and respiratory therapy programs. Essentially, Collins is able to handles all aspects of each program in-house, and it does so at an extremely low tuition of \$50 per credit hour. Collins provides these courses through its own faculty, who are then hired by the partner institutions as adjunct professors. Further, Collins programs are already accredited by pertinent accrediting bodies within the fields for technical coursework, and each program has general accreditation from the Council on Occupational Education. This is the same accreditation community colleges must attain when providing these programs. The prerequisites, course

requirements, faculty requirements, and rigor are comparable to associate degree programs in such fields at Ohio community colleges.

Although we appreciate our partnerships with West Virginia and Kentucky, we do not believe our students should need to cross state lines to obtain Associate's degrees and start their careers. Despite best efforts and our documented success in these programs, we have been unable to partner with any Ohio community colleges to provide associate degrees in these high-demand fields. There has been a general reluctance among Ohio institutions to provide associate degrees with a concentration in the specific fields of coursework, and a preference toward awarding an "Associate of Technical Studies" (ATS) degree with merely a generic concentration, such as "Health Studies." However, students must obtain an associate degree with a specific concentration in sonography, rad tech, and respiratory therapy in order to become licensed and practice in those high-demand fields.

To address this issue, and to maximize the return on investment the state makes in its career centers, we propose creating a pilot program permitting us to award, in-house, associate's degrees in technical studies with concentrations in sonography, rad tech, and respiratory therapy. The pilot program will be limited to those areas and the Lawrence County region. Further, it would remain subject to accreditation requirements mentioned above regarding these programs, and we recommend that the Board of Regents/Department of Higher Education be responsible for monitoring and oversight of the program and report back to the General Assembly on effectiveness and value to students, employers, and the community. We do not seek any additional state funds in relation to this proposal.

We believe that this program will significantly benefit our students, our local employers, the Appalachian region as a whole, and the state. Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue.