

Ohio House of Representatives
Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education
HB 64
Testimony of Peter Perkowski
Campus President, Brown Mackie College – North Canton

Good afternoon. I'm Peter Perkowski, campus president of Brown Mackie College – North Canton. It's an honor to be here.

Brown Mackie College – North Canton, with a student population of 400, is located in the Belden Village area in Canton, and has had a presence there since 1984. We are one of four Brown Mackie schools in Ohio, the others being the main campus in Cincinnati, and branch campuses in Findlay, and Akron. As part of the Education Management Corporation family of schools, we are also represented in Ohio by the Art Institute of Ohio in Cincinnati, and South University in Cleveland. In total we serve over 2,500 students, and among us we offer diploma, associate, bachelor, master, and doctoral level programs.

With the exception of the Art Institute, the majority of our students are enrolled in the healthcare, technology and business programs, which are supported by employment opportunities in our communities. These are inclusive of nursing, surgical technology, medical assisting, occupational therapy, physical therapy, computer and information technology, graphic design, and business management.

What is Ohio? Truly - it's the people. Those who live here, go to school here, work here, raise their families here, and live out their lives here. **Our students are Ohio!** They graduate, work here, raise their families here, **THEY STAY HERE.** They make up a key element of the infrastructure of our state. Career college students **are the heart of Ohio, the great Buckeye State.**

But, are our students deserving to have OCOG grant allocations equal to the amount allocated for students attending the public sector's institutions? Are they deserving to be treated equal in debt reduction under House Bill 64? **Yes, of course.** But, they need your help. Most are first-generation students, predominantly female, many are single moms; they work while they are going to school, they commute, living paycheck to paycheck ... they survive. They desire better.

Who could be more deserving? 72% of career college students earn degrees in healthcare, technology and business - Ohio's fastest growing and in-demand occupations, according to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

You know our students. They take care of you, your family, and your friends. They touch you or someone you know every day. Many times there is a zero degree of separation. My own family doctor and dermatologist employ Brown Mackie College medical assistants. I'm proud of them, and confident in their ability to take care of me, and of you.

- Our nurses are the caregivers to more and more baby boomers who are in need of their skills and services. They are the front line in hospitals, nursing homes and in our homes. Does OCOG make a difference to career college nurses? Absolutely. In 2009 right before the OCOG was cut, Brown Mackie College – North Canton had over 300 students in its practical nursing program. Today we have just a little over 30 students. From my experience, I would estimate that approximately 50% of the student loss – for a career that healthcare continues to tell us is in demand – is due to the loss of OCOG.

The tempting thought might be to assume that this gap will be filled by the traditional colleges. But, healthcare employers seek out our grads. As just one example ...

- Our surgical techs work front line and side-by-side with our esteemed surgeons, in neurosurgery, cardiology, burn units, general surgery, and plastics. O.R.'s could hire the majority of their surgical techs from a local, very reputable university that has a similar program to Brown Mackie's. (And I'm even a fan of their nationally ranked soccer team.) But, Akron Children's Hospital is employing eight of our grads. In Canton, Aultman Hospital and Mercy Hospital ask for our graduates. Over 80% of Mercy's surgical techs are Brown Mackie grads (that's about 11 out of 15 - our grads); over 60% of Aultman's surgical techs - our grads. The Cleveland Clinic is employing four of our surgical techs in cardiology alone, and several more in other areas. Mt. Saint Carmel West here in Columbus has employed two BMC surgical techs.

Why are they asking for our surgical technology grads over the tradition college grads? Our grads walk in on day one of their four-month externship ready to scrub in – that's an immediate positive impact that is noticed by the surgeons and OR directors. They are a very particular and demanding group of professionals, and they know exactly what they need. They don't always have time to train new employees on the job. In November we had five surgical tech grads. All five are now employed by local hospitals. And within 90 days of graduating.

Let me tell you one student's story that personifies the demand for our students and their impact on local communities.

Before enrolling at Brown Mackie College, Emily looked into a traditional college's surgical tech program. She chose us due to the personal attention she received on her visits, and not having to go on a 1-2 year waiting list before being able to enroll in this program at the other college. She didn't feel she had time to wait. And, most of our students don't. She worked and studied hard, and before she graduated she was offered a job at her externship site at the Cleveland Clinic. Although she was honored, she declined so she could stay close to her fiancé and family in Canton. Within a few months she was hired onto the neurosurgery team at Aultman Hospital. This young career college graduate is highly respected in what she does. Her education and work experience have allowed her to participate on mission trips to Honduras. She could take her talents and experience out of state, but she is putting her roots down and staying here. She is Ohio. She is a career college graduate.

There are others who aspire to be like Emily, but can't due to the need for financial assistance. An increase in OCOG for career college students would make the difference for them.

I've only been talking about Brown Mackie College – North Canton graduates, and just scratching the surface of two programs. Imagine the thousands of career college grads all across the state of Ohio touching your lives and your family's lives daily, in the healthcare, culinary, technology, legal, and business fields.

Ohio is in the heartland of our country, and the heart of Ohio is our working men and women, the career college students, the career college graduates satisfying the needs of our employers, the grads touching your lives.

Who better to benefit from an increase in the Ohio College Opportunity Grant? Who better to benefit from being treated equal in debt reduction under House Bill 64?

Please, give serious consideration to my request to strengthen the infrastructure of our great state by looking out for career college students. After all, they will be looking out for us.

Thank you.