

Christopher Mattress
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Good afternoon Chairman Perales, Ranking Member Ramos, and members of the Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the impact of state funding on students from low-income families. My name is Christopher Jermaine Edward Mattress, and I am a senior Middle Childhood Education major with a focus in Math and Social studies at Miami University. When I graduate, I hope to make an impact on educational policy while pursuing my dream of having my own non-profit organization. I am from the Winton Terrace community of Cincinnati, Ohio, which is a lower income community in Cincinnati, Ohio.

The purpose of my testimony today is to illuminate to you that the decisions your committee make affect more than just the AP student coming into college with 40 plus credits. Your decisions have an enormous impact on people like me, people who want to further their education, people who give back to their communities. The resources that you provide or don't provide determine how many people like me will have the opportunity to testify before this committee in the future. Yes I am a rarity and I would like to be the last rarity, please help!

I am not supposed to be here. My community is a location where childhood friends are incarcerated for multiple decades in state penitentiary, while others did not live to walk across the stage and receive their high school diploma. Despite the grim outlook to some, I was fortunate to have a mother who was unbelievably rich with the dreams she had for her only child son. I was surrounded by a network of individuals who pushed me to imagine something beyond the conditions of my neighbor. I remember having to stay in the house on hot summer days to practice reading and review my math flash cards. Many days, I

would have to decline my friends invitations to come out to play in order to complete my homework. I never fully realized how much those sacrifices had paid off until my senior year of college when I began witnessing how those things began laying the foundation for my post collegiate life. I often pinch myself knowing that statistics indicate that I shouldn't be here testifying before you today. But for the love of a mother and for the kind and generous individuals within my community, I could have easily have taken another path.

I primarily chose Miami University because of the financial aid package extended to me. I had previously visited Miami University once or twice prior to Orientation in the summer of 2013. Although some staff within my high school had discouraged me from sending my scores to Miami, I was determined to seize the opportunity and I used their hesitation as a motivator to succeed. I will forever be grateful for the opportunity Miami University gave a kid from the metropolitan projects of Winton Terrace in Cincinnati, Ohio, with all odds against him to pursue his degree in higher education.

Miami University has positively affected my life, my future, and my family's life. I have grown into the strong leader that I, and my mother, knew was always there. Miami has provided me with the resources, connections and rich opportunities including the chance to intern with the Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools, Columbus, Ohio; City Inc., Cleveland, Community; and Education Matters, Santa Maria Community Center and Peaslee Community center through Miami's Urban Teaching Cohort, which is lead by Miami Professor Tammy Schwartz. Dr. Schwartz does an outstanding job of exposing students with first hand exposure to real world issues affecting communities around the United States.

Additionally, Miami has provided me with numerous chances to mentor and tutor students within inner city public schools throughout Ohio: Paul L. Dunbar out of Cleveland Public Schools, Rothenberg Academy, Frederick Douglas Elementary, Winton Hills Academy (my middle school) and Woodward High School. Yes, these things look good on a resume, but I am proudest that they afforded me the opportunity to give back to communities and kids from communities similar to my neighborhood. I have also remembered my home community by helping to coordinate book bag drives that have helped provide 600 plus children of the Winton Terrace community with book bags and school supplies. Witnessing the relief and smiles of the parents of these children was similar to the sigh of relief of my mom whenever she received this type of generosity as I grew up.

I strive to be the best role model, teacher, leader, and statistical nightmare for any child growing up with any circumstances against them: race, financial, sexuality or disability. It is my passion to let them know that they can be somebody in this world. We need to understand first that its not just on them but it's on all of us - there's a saying that goes something like "it takes a village to raise a child". This is true because every child is not given the best start to life and without institutions like Miami University and people like Randi Thomas (Director of Miami University Institutional Relations), how will we ever know their truest potential? Many people can get trapped in the "hood" but not a lot of us can make it out because of our circumstances, and I am blessed to be apart of rare percentage that does.

Over my four years at Miami University I've been provided with the mindset that the world isn't perfect and sometimes you have to get out of your comfort zone and do things

non traditional to get to where you want to be. As a black man attending a predominantly white institution, I could have left Miami saying this isn't fair but I didn't because I saw the value of Miami a long time ago. With the many incidents and tragedies around race that our country has experienced over the past few years, my Miami on campus and off campus experiential learning opportunities have provided me with a perspective of how things may look and work in the real world. I don't fault Miami for any of those not so good experiences but I thank them, I thank them because I know for sure without a doubt now that I can be put into any situation and still be able to thrive and contribute to it. I truly thank Miami for that because I believe I would not have gained this kind of experience without attending the best university in these United States. I would just like to thank Miami University for everything they have done for me for these four years, God bless and thank you for this opportunity to share my story in front of you all today.

I'm happy to answer any questions.