



CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY

Office of the President

Testimony Before the House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education Dr. Ronald M. Berkman, President, Cleveland State University March 22, 2017

Chairman Perales, Ranking Member Ramos, Representative Duffey, Representative Anielski and Representative Antonio:

Good afternoon. I am Ronald M. Berkman, president of Cleveland State University. I also serve as chair of the Inter-University Council of Ohio, which represents the state's 14 public universities. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to the Subcommittee today.

Chairman Perales, a special word of thanks to you for taking the time recently to make campus visits. We were honored to have you and Representative Antonio visit CSU to gain a better understanding of the issues that state universities are facing with regard to House Bill 49.

I am accompanied today by two outstanding student leaders from CSU. Sierra Davidson is a student member of the University's Board of Trustees. She is majoring in psychology. Malek Khawam, who earned a B.A. in urban studies last year and is now completing a master of public administration degree, is president of our Student Government Association.

IN MY JUDGMENT, PUBLIC POLICY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION should be driven by the state's goal of dramatically increasing the percentage of our population with postsecondary education, and the related strategic goal to drive down the cost of a college education. The preeminent goal of significantly reducing student costs is only achieved by decreasing the time it takes to earn a degree. Realistically, this is the only way to assure that this goal is met. If we are going to do right by Ohio's college students, we need to create a culture in higher education that encourages students to finish what they have started – in a timely fashion – and rewards those who do. I will speak in a moment about the success we have seen at Cleveland State University in accelerating this path to completion.

First, let me frame my remarks with a bit of context. Unfortunately, far too many college students are *not* crossing the finish line, on time or otherwise. Less than half of the nation's students graduate in four years, and only 60 percent graduate in six years. Specific to Ohio, the latest data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center indicates that only 35 percent of first-time, full-time degree-seeking students graduate in four years, and only 63 percent graduate in six years.

The longer it takes students to matriculate, the less likely they are to ultimately earn a degree. This is confirmed in a national study by Complete College America, aptly titled "Time Is the Enemy." In addition to reducing the likelihood of completion, every additional year that a student spends at a public four-year college costs approximately \$68,000 (nearly \$23,000 in cost of attendance and \$45,000 in lost wages), according to Complete College America. Think about it: A student who finishes college in four years, as opposed to six years, saves \$46,000 in cost of attendance – and simultaneously stands to earn an additional \$90,000 in wages. Over two years, this represents a \$136,000 impact.

Time *is* money. If we want to reduce the cost of higher education for the student, reducing the time to degree completion is absolutely critical.

BY WAY OF EXAMPLE, PLEASE ALLOW ME TO ILLUSTRATE SOME OF THE INNOVATIVE STEPS we are taking to this end at Cleveland State University. As I am sure our alumni on the Subcommittee can attest, much has changed at CSU in recent years. Not apparent to the naked eye but profoundly impactful in terms of the big picture is the new student learning platform that CSU has built, with very promising results.

We know that the college experience can be fraught with potential cracks to fall through, especially for first-generation students or nontraditional students, who are far more likely than their peers to drop out. Designed to maximize opportunities for all students to succeed, our student learning platform has paved better pathways for optimizing degree completion, including incentives that reward students. Starting with the 2012-2013 academic year, CSU has introduced a suite of programs – including multi-term registration, demand-driven enrollment, an adjusted tuition band and a Graduation Incentive Plan – to help students stay on track to graduation.

Multi-term registration allows students to plan coursework for an entire academic year at once, rather than by semester, thereby facilitating access to required courses. We have seen steady growth in usage of multi-term registration, which nearly 28,000 students have utilized during the current academic year. Multi-term registration is used by three out of four CSU undergraduates, and 65 percent of our students overall.

Demand-driven enrollment enables students to request spots in courses at full capacity via online waitlists, and makes it possible for departments to open additional class sections to meet demand. Since the inception of this option at CSU, the number of enrollments facilitated from waitlists has increased nearly 150 percent for fall terms (from 1,530 students in fall 2012 to

3,778 students in fall 2016) and more than 90 percent for spring terms (from 2,793 students in fall 2013 to 5,374 students in spring 2016).

CSU's **adjusted tuition band** lets students take up to six three-credit hour courses per semester at the same cost as four courses. This represents a potential savings of \$2,409 per semester. When we adjusted the tuition band during fiscal year 2016, the cost to CSU was \$413,000.

Our **Graduation Incentive Plan** provided a 2 percent tuition rebate and a \$200 book stipend to students who completed 30 credit hours per academic year in good academic standing. From fiscal year 2014 through fiscal year 2017, the cost of the Graduation Incentive Plan to CSU was \$3.9 million.

CSU **capped baccalaureate degrees at 120 credit hours**, except for programs in which accreditation standards require the curriculum to exceed the threshold. The 120-credit-hour standard, which took effect with the 2014-2015 academic year, corresponded with our conversion to a dominant 3-credit-hour curriculum. Prior to this, most CSU programs required 128 credit hours for graduation. These measures saved time and saved money for students, shaving off more than half a semester's worth of course load and resulting in tuition savings of approximately \$3,200.

As a result of these programs and incentives, CSU has seen encouraging increases in the number of undergraduates taking 12 or more credit hours per semester. Today, 72 percent of CSU undergraduates are taking at least 12 credit hours per semester. We also have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of undergraduates taking more than 30 credit hours in an academic year, which has nearly doubled over the past decade.

Based on our experience at Cleveland State University, streamlining the path toward college completion is an idea well worth exploring further.

AS PART OF OUR EFFORTS TO REDUCE COSTS TO STUDENTS, Cleveland State University also has addressed textbook affordability and accessibility. While we are not in favor of the textbook purchase mandate in House Bill 49, we have already met with success in taking on this issue. Credit is due to Student Government Association President Malek Khawam and his fellow student leaders.

CSU is among the first institutions in Ohio to join the national Open Textbook Network. CSU also is one of the earliest adopters of open-access textbooks in the state. Currently, our ASC101 University Life course – a requirement for incoming first-year students – uses a free, open-access textbook. Dr. Glenda Thornton, director of the CSU library, leads the Inter-University Council Taskforce on Textbook Affordability and Open Education Resources. Through her work, we have been offering grants to incentivize CSU faculty to review, adopt and develop open-access education materials. We also have worked with our book supplier to negotiate best prices for

students, to create a robust used textbook and rental market and to standardize textbooks for high enrollment gateway courses.

IN THE TIME I HAVE REMAINING, I would like to put forth three innovative recommendations that address the pressing need to graduate students in a timely manner, reduce student debt and save lost wages.

First, I respectfully ask the Subcommittee to consider an increase in the State Share of Instruction (SSI). Despite recent increases in state funding for higher education, the SSI per student in Ohio remains 27 percent – or \$1,900 – below the national average. In terms of state fiscal support for higher education per capita, Ohio ranks 40th out of 50 states, according to data for fiscal year 2016-2017 from the Center for the Study of Education Policy at Illinois State University and the State Higher Education Executive Officers.

I propose an incremental increase in the SSI that would move Ohio closer to the national average. This increase would allow us to institute a tuition rebate program for students who stay on track to graduate in four years by taking 30 credit hours or more per academic year while remaining in good academic standing. At CSU, we have seen firsthand that this kind of incentivization can be a powerful motivator. This increase must be large enough to support the additional courses needed for students to achieve the 30 credit goal, to supplement the necessary academic support services and to have revenue to support the rebate.

Second, please help us strengthen the connections between Ohio's public universities and Ohio's employers.

We need more forward-thinking partnerships such as the collaboration that we announced last week among University Hospitals, Cleveland State University and Cuyahoga Community College, which will establish a comprehensive workforce development pathway to increase the number of registered nurses and the number who earn a baccalaureate degree in nursing (BSN). Our goal is to proactively address the impending shortage of nurses in Northeast Ohio, which will need at least another 3,500 nurses by 2020, according to The Center for Health Affairs.

This unique collaboration will institute a new cohort of 64 students in CSU's BSN program, above and beyond the 160 students currently admitted each year. In addition to its established tuition reimbursement program, University Hospitals will support these students by creating a Nursing Scholars Program (offering 20 students a \$12,000 tuition support contract for their junior and senior years), incentivizing qualified University Hospitals RNs to serve as CSU clinical instructors and extending opportunities for students to work as part-time nursing assistants while attending school.

Through the collaboration, we anticipate a 40 percent increase in the number of CSU BSN graduates when the new cohort graduates in 2020, as well as a 10 percent increase in the completion rate of Tri-C students within two years, which will further increase the number of

nurses with BSN degrees – the current requirement for nurses in the Cleveland metropolitan area.

I hope this collaboration, which boldly reimagines the possibilities for public-private partnerships, is just the beginning. To seed more partnerships along these lines, we propose the creation of a venture fund that would make it possible for Ohio's public universities to expand programs in response to workforce opportunities. As it stands, universities cannot successfully and responsively deploy resources because of the fixed assets associated with university budgets. A venture fund would enable us to rapidly deploy resources for additional faculty needed to meet increased enrollment in high-demand programs. Over time, the new revenue would more than cover associated costs. The venture fund would provide a number of modalities to yield a return on the state's investment, while also generating significant dividends for students and employers. This fund is supported by colleagues at four- and two-year institutions.

Third, I respectfully ask the Subcommittee to consider dramatically increasing support to accelerate co-ops and internships. The state university system requires funding at a level that would allow us to produce substantial results while bringing our co-op/internship workforce programs to scale. Universities should be supported for meeting established goals for co-ops, internships and field placement.

IN ADDITION TO EMBRACING AND NURTURING PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS LIKE NEVER BEFORE, these proposals would have a significant impact on ensuring students graduate on time and connect with real-world opportunities.

Chairman Perales and members of the Subcommittee, many thanks once again for this opportunity to share my testimony with you on behalf of Cleveland State University. At this time, I welcome any questions you may have.