

BEFORE THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

**SENATOR MATT DOLAN
CHAIR**

**TESTIMONY
OF
BRUCE JOHNSON
PRESIDENT
INTER-UNIVERSITY COUNCIL OF OHIO**

JUNE 12, 2019

The Public Universities of Ohio

The University of Akron
University of Cincinnati
Miami University
Ohio University
Wright State University

Bowling Green State University
Cleveland State University
Northeast Ohio Medical University
Shawnee State University
Youngstown State University

Central State University
Kent State University
The Ohio State University
The University of Toledo

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Burke, Ranking Minority Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on behalf of the state's fourteen public universities, all of which are members of the Inter-University Council of Ohio (IUC). My name is Bruce Johnson and I am the President of the IUC.

Thank you for your support for Ohio's public universities in the Senate substitute version of House Bill 166, the biennial operating budget for Fiscal Years 2020 and 2021.

Ohio's public universities appreciate Governor DeWine's support for higher education in his executive proposal and the one percent increase in state share of instruction (SSI) funding he proposed. We also appreciate the commitment shown by the Ohio House to ensure a quality educational experience for our students by maintaining that level of funding. We are particularly appreciative, however, of the Senate's willingness to increase funding for the SSI by an additional \$40.1 million over the biennium.

This targeted investment will help ensure that the state's public institutions of higher education can continue to offer a quality product with a meaningful return. Further, this investment will more closely align growth in our state subsidy with the current rate of inflationary growth as determined by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in the consumer price index (CPI). The current CPI for all major categories, less food and energy, as of April 2019, was 2.1 percent. This rate is a reasonable measure of the increasing cost of doing business and is very much felt by public universities.

The IUC also would like to express its appreciation for your support for financial aid. Financial aid plays a key role in keeping students in college. Institutional support and support from the state in the form of need-based financial aid through the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG) and other scholarship programs help mitigate one of the major risks confronting students today – financial need. The OCOG program serves almost 64,000 students at Ohio public and private universities, including 46,411 at just our state universities and helps financially at-risk students cover those academic costs that the federal Pell Grant does not.

The DeWine Administration and the Ohio House have stepped up to help meet that need and now the Senate has too. The Governor's proposed budget increased funding for OCOG by 21.2 percent in each fiscal year, or by over \$47.3 million across the biennium, and the House substitute version of the bill maintained that funding level. The Senate substitute bill recommends an additional \$6 million in funding over the biennium. For public university students, this should result in an increased award amount.

I would like to point out, however, that I believe a further change is required to Section 381.360 (B)(2), which sets in law specific award amounts for OCOG eligible public and private university students. The Senate appropriated an additional \$3 million in each fiscal year, but the student award amounts set in (B)(2) remained the same. With additional dollars to distribute, and it does not appear that those dollars were earmarked for any other purpose, award amounts should have been increased to reflect that reality. Ohio Department of Higher Education officials roughly estimate that, with some additional financial flexibility they already have, plus the Senate's \$6 million increase, student award amounts should be changed in this section by adding a further \$100 per student in each fiscal year for both private and public university students. This investment will increase access to a college education for our neediest students. Thank you for supporting these students.

The IUC requests the Senate reinstate the authority granted in the House passed version of the bill to state institutions of higher education to assess a campus-wide student mental health and substance abuse fee. Under the House version, the fee was subject to approval by the chancellor and would have been applied in such a manner that any new funding available would supplement and not supplant existing funding for services. This additional authority is critical because the mental health and substance abuse crisis has grown beyond our institutions' ability to provide services in a manner that comprehensively meets the need. It is no exaggeration to state that each one of Ohio's public universities is experiencing its own student mental health and substance abuse crisis, just as Ohio is experiencing a statewide crisis. It should not be ignored.

Nationally, over one third of counseling centers report having a waitlist for services. Comparing data from contributing Ohio institutions with the national sample, Ohio evidenced significantly more counseling center clients having been hospitalized for mental health concerns (Ohio = 23.5 percent, National = 9.8 percent) – the demand for services on campus is overwhelming the ability to serve. And, unfortunately, those services come at a cost. There is a shortage of healthcare workers on campus, caused, to some degree, by lack of funding. Counselors, clinical psychologists, doctors, nurses, and others are part of the solution. The ability to add staff will reduce wait time for services and in an immediate crisis, where a student may be contemplating suicide, putting that student on a three-week waiting list for counseling is not an option. The number of students seeking services can overwhelm local service providers – this is true especially where a university is in a small town like Oxford, Athens, Newark, Bowling Green, or Kent. Finally, students themselves are asking for an additional fee to support the provision of such services.

Drug addiction and substance abuse, too, can adversely affect a college career just as quickly and permanently as mental illness. Unarguably, it is a problem just as serious and prevalent. According to the National Institute of Drug Abuse Ohio Survey (February 2018), Ohio is among the top five states with the highest rates of opioid-related overdose deaths. Since 2010, the number of heroin-related deaths increased from 355 to 1,478, and deaths related to synthetic opioids rose from 175 to 2,296.

I ask this committee to consider the current health crisis facing our state and to support its public universities as they try to mitigate the negative affect it is having on our students' ability to earn a degree. At the very least, if a fee is not an option, then I would ask you to consider an additional appropriation of funds to support campus mental health and substance abuse services. The IUC requested an amendment for inclusion in the Senate to appropriate \$8 million over the biennium to fund programs on campus, to provide some additional assistance to support the work we do on behalf of our students in this area. That appropriation was not included in the Senate substitute bill. We appreciate your consideration of our request.

We believe that our public institutions of higher education are a great value for our students. It is our students who have determined that enrolling in a public university to earn a degree is the best investment for their future and that there is value in the educational experience and in the degree that is earned. It is evident from the Senate's version of HB 166, that it shares the same belief and is appropriating funding for public higher education in a manner that facilitates the work we do and while affording students an opportunity to realize the maximum return on their investment.

Chair Dolan and members of the Committee, thank you for your consideration of my testimony today on behalf of Ohio's public universities and thank you for your clear support. I think we would all agree that the students we serve are the foundation of Ohio's future.