



**Testimony For House Bill (HB) 514—Regards higher education, student financial aid, intern wages
Presented by Jane M. Wood, PhD, President, Bluffton University**

Thank you Chair Lanese, Vice Chair Young, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Higher Education and Career Readiness Committee, for the opportunity to speak with you today. I support your goals to increase the numbers of students to attend Ohio higher education institutions, including scholarships in the STEM fields for out-of-state students, and to encourage graduating students stay for five years in Ohio following Commencement. I also endorse the transfer “plus up” of up to half of an Ohio College Opportunity Grant award amount for students with financial need who transfer from a two-year institution to obtain a bachelor’s degree at a four-year college or university, as well as the opportunity to offer businesses a tax credit for expanding internship opportunities.

Why It is Important to Incentivize Students to Attend Ohio Four-year Colleges and Universities

Since 1899, Bluffton University has been contributing to the State of Ohio by creating exceptional STEM graduates. We are currently in the process of constructing a new STEM academic center, with the generous help of the Knowlton Foundation, to meet the state-of-the-art needs for current students to enter into the workforce in STEM fields. At this time approximately 29% of Bluffton University students are in a STEM major or planning to enter into one. We offer nearly 50 majors, with twelve of those in STEM, not including our students majoring in Education with STEM specialties. We have less than 20% of our current student body who attend from another state.

The current climate of recruiting students, especially in the STEM fields, has become increasingly more competitive. For the State of Ohio to attract out-of-state students, the ability to offer additional scholarship dollars will be key. Other states already offer these types of opportunities to Ohio graduating seniors, and we do see more and more students gravitating to other states, especially those that border northwest Ohio: Indiana and Michigan. Our ability to keep, attract, and retain students for Ohio will increasingly depend upon our ability to offer families competitive financial aid packages. At Bluffton University, the average student pays approximately \$11,616 dollars in tuition and fees in AY2021—22. Even this amount, which is competitive with public institutions, sometimes will not entice students who see more scholarship dollars from their home state, or another state that is offering additional scholarships.

Our students receive a value-added education, and our evidence for this education is in our stellar placement rates. We are pleased that 99% of our graduates have found employment in their major or in a field related to their major within six months. We also have experiential learning embedded in our Bluffton Blueprint, which offers hands on learning over four years with each year focusing on a particular aspect of leadership and citizenship. For the second year, for example, all of our sophomore students in the mandatory class titled, “Learning in Community”, will complete a mini-internship in a non-profit located in nearby Lima, Ohio. There, they have experiences, for example, in the Juvenile Detention Center (JDC), Headstart, and Crime Victim Services. This small internship model allows students to put their classroom knowledge to use in service to their communities. The majority of our majors also require an internship. However, we also know that this is difficult for some of our Pell Eligible students to choose an internship that does not provide summer income. Additional dollars to support businesses so that they can pay students to work in the summer will increase opportunities for



our students to get to know Ohio employers and for our employers to evaluate our students for full time work.

For example, one of our local employers, Wannemacher Logistics, runs a summer internship program where our students regularly attend. Mr. Wannemacher is open about telling students that if they do a thorough job there may be opportunities for full time employment upon graduation. Mr. Wannemacher now employs a number of full-time workers who have been with him for many years who came through this internship program. While these types of opportunities are certainly not unique to Bluffton University, more placements for all of our students at all levels will help Ohio grow and retain its workforce.

Thank you so much for allowing me to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.