

## **19<sup>th</sup> House District**

Parts of NE Franklin County  
Including Columbus, Gahanna,  
New Albany, Westerville, Minerva Park,  
and area townships



## **134<sup>th</sup> General Assembly Committees**

Energy and Natural Resources  
Health  
Higher Education and Career Readiness  
Primary & Secondary Education  
Technology and Innovation, Ranking Member

### **Representative Mary Lightbody 19<sup>th</sup> House District**

Testimony to the Higher Education and Career Readiness Committee  
House Bill 667  
December 6, 2022  
Mary Lightbody, Ph.D.

Chairman Young, Ranking Member Ingram, and fellow members of the House Higher Education and Career Readiness Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify in support of House Bill 667.

I think we can all agree that we want to provide the highest quality education for every student possible. Despite our best efforts many districts within the state of Ohio struggle to secure the funding needed to support the needs of their students. In Ohio, there are currently 1.6 million students enrolled in public schools, and almost 800,000 of these students are economically disadvantaged<sup>1</sup>. Thus, it is important now more than ever to expand educational opportunities to low income schools, in order to close the gap in the inequality seen in Ohio education.

If passed, House Bill 667 would establish the Grow Your Own Teacher college scholarship program, which is intended to provide four-year college scholarships and institutional support to low-income high school seniors who commit to teach in their school district's high need public schools. It could also include other qualified employees such as para-professionals and substitutes who have high school diplomas and want to attend college to secure a teaching license. The four year scholarships would provide \$7,500 per year to those accepted into the program which is designed to increase the diversity of the teaching staff in Ohio schools so the staff more closely resembles the diversity of the student population. Applicants need to have graduated from a public high school in Ohio, have been or be eligible for free or reduced price lunch throughout high school, and commit to, within 6 years after college graduation teach for 4 years at a public school. The school in which they teach must be in the district from which they graduated, and at least fifty percent of students qualify for free or reduced price lunch.

Nearly every state has at least one GYO program, and as of right now, 15 states provide direct funding for Grow Your Own program development, implementation, and sustainability. For instance, in Illinois, Grow Your Own teacher candidates receive up to \$25,000 in a state-funded loan, the loans are forgiven after a graduate has taught in a school position for a minimum of 5 years. Allowing for Grow Your Own candidates to receive financial support, would enable teachers to graduate with less debt, which is essential considering many starting teacher salaries are only \$40,000 a year<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ohiobythenumbers.com/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.usnews.com/education/articles/what-to-know-about-grow-your-own-teacher-programs>

Allowing for a low-income Ohio student to give back to their community would not only result in substantial positive change in the school district, but also allow students an opportunity to attend a secondary institution to pursue a degree, which they otherwise may not be able to do. In 2020, enrollment for low income high school graduates across all types of colleges decreased by 29.2%<sup>3</sup>. Proactively creating legislation to make college more accessible to low income students is essential if Ohio wishes to close the visible gap seen in educational opportunities in relation to economic status.

Since introducing this legislation, I have heard from a number of interested parties who are eager to have this program in place and who have offered feedback regarding ways to strengthen this proposal. These suggestions include expanding eligibility to ensure that our Appalachian school districts can participate and including a mentorship component so that our early career educators have a strong support system. I intend to continue working on this legislation during the 135<sup>th</sup> General Assembly and hope that members of this committee and other Ohioans with an interest in Grow Your Own Teacher will work with me to put forth a strong proposal.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this important piece of legislation. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee members may have.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.the74million.org/article/new-data-college-enrollment-for-low-income-high-school-grads-plunged-by-29-during-the-pandemic/>