

March 4, 2021 – House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education
Mark Weinberg, Dean, George V. Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs
Written Testimony on House Bill 110

Chair Cross, Ranking Member Howse, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education; thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on House Bill 110 and in support of the Appalachian New Economy Partnership line, the Co-Op and Internship line, and the Rural Universities Program line. These appropriation lines all provide critical dollars to the southeast Ohio region and state of Ohio to leverage resources and partnerships to drive innovation and economic growth, health and wellness, water quality, and capacity-building for businesses, local governments, and nonprofits. In addition, thank you for your leadership and partnership as we confront this public health crisis caused by COVID-19, as well as the economic challenges associated with this unprecedented pandemic.

My name is Mark Weinberg, and I am the Dean of the George V. Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs at Ohio University. The Voinovich School is a professional college and a leader among public service schools, working in public-private partnerships to find solutions to challenges facing communities, the economy, and the environment.

The **Appalachian New Economy Partnership (GRF 234-428)** supports a suite of business and economic development programs. Each program provides targeted technical assistance, talent development, access to capital, and training to a specific segment of the market – small businesses, social enterprises, manufacturing start-ups, those seeking government contracts, and communities striving to revitalize their economy. Combined, these programs have generated \$5 billion in economic activity in the last ten years. In the last two years alone, these programs have created/retained 590 jobs, infused \$39 million in capital, and secured \$952 million in government contracts for businesses in Ohio. For every \$1 of ANEP funds invested, the Voinovich School draws down \$8 in federal funding.

The Appalachian New Economy Partnership additionally supports healthy families. We work with multiple state agencies including the Ohio Mental Health and Addiction Services and local nonprofits to build individual and regional capacity related to maternal and infant health, food access, mental/emotional development, and prevention of child abuse, teen pregnancy, addiction, and suicide. Our Community Prevention work alone brought in over \$11 million over the last five years to expand efforts to control the opioid epidemic and other forms of substance abuse.

The Appalachian New Economy Partnership supports water quality. In collaboration with the Governor's Office of Appalachian and Local Development Districts as well as the Ohio EPA, the School provides financial, administrative, and technical assistance to support diverse initiatives focused on improving water quality by working with local groups to rehab abandoned mining sites, expand broadband, minimize acid drainage, reduce waste, and map regional water access. Through this work, 200+ polluted stream miles can now support fish and other aquatic life.

Finally, the Appalachian New Economy Partnership supports an educated Workforce. ANEP funds partnerships with programs like Building Bridges to Careers, a Marietta-based workforce training programs for high school students that recently received a \$386,000 expansion grant from the Gates Foundation. This compliments our extensive STEM work with K-16 teachers, and students.

We are respectfully requesting restoration funding of the ANEP line to the FY21 levels of \$4,141,600 per year. After the earmarked funds of \$500,000 to Mahoning Valley Innovation and Commercialization Center the rest of these funds would be directed to the Voinovich School. It is important to note that the ANEP will continue to support economic growth during a critical time. For example, we were recently awarded a US EDA grant in the amount of \$2.2 million, allowing us to further help coal-based communities diversify their economies through opportunity zones, skill shed analyses, and feasibility studies. Without the ANEP, this funding would not have been an option.

The **Co-Op and Internship line (GRF 235-591)**, a multi-university program, has afforded the Voinovich Academy for Excellence in Public Service the opportunity to build critically needed capacity in local communities by educating and mentoring Ohioans engaged in public service. The Academy works to increase capacity and effectiveness of Ohio's public and nonprofit sectors in underserved areas by providing no-cost high-quality, interactive training with a focus on these key areas: encouraging collaboration, implementing best practices, building leaders capacity, developing partnerships, and enhancing communication skills.

We are respectfully requesting restoration funding of the Voinovich School portion of the Co-Op and Internship line to the FY21 levels of \$650,00 per year. This funding level will allow the Voinovich Academy the opportunity to fully implement the Appalachian Law Enforcement Initiative. This innovative new program will utilize virtual reality technology to train law enforcement to deescalate conflict more effectively and will involve a whole-of-community approach. Additionally, restoration funding will allow the Academy to expand access to, and adoption of, Lean Six Sigma principles and training in southeast Ohio as well as support the needs of regional agencies in the fields of children and family services, mental health, suicide and substance abuse prevention through customized leadership and management training.

The **Rural Universities Program (GRF 235-598)**, a multi-university program, has equipped Ohio University's Voinovich School with the tools, expertise, and statewide connections required to support local government leaders in today's challenging environment. The School supports and builds the capacity of the members of the Mayors' Partnership for Progress, a bipartisan coalition of mayors and city managers in 18 counties of southeast Ohio, representing nearly 120 communities and almost 800,000 people. In the previous two years, the Rural Universities Program enabled the Voinovich School to provide critical 2020 census support, communications assistance, advice on accessing and utilizing emergency federal funding, and collaboration with DSA and the Ohio Mayors Alliance on media efforts. Additionally, the Voinovich School worked in partnership with local development districts to place students in internships with various local governments, providing real-world experience and increasing capacity of the cities.

With continuation funding of \$100,000 per year to the Voinovich School, the Rural Universities Program will enable the Voinovich School to continue to identify and access support and resources through the pandemic and beyond, to support these communities holistically and build their capacity.

As the state continues to emerge from this crisis, we stand ready to continue to be effective partners. Again, thank you for your leadership and never hesitate to contact me whenever the Voinovich School can be of assistance or with questions at 740-707-1225 or weinberm@ohio.edu.