

Senate Bill 135 Proponent Testimony
Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
April 27, 2021

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chairman Cirino, Ranking Member Williams and Members of the Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 135. My name is Aaron Greene, and I am the CEO of IN the College Planning Experts, and its nonprofit arm, INspired Educational Planning, with offices in Bexley, Powell, Upper Arlington, and virtual campus that allows us to serve students across the state and the world. Since founding IN in 2009, our college counselors have assisted over 1,000 students and their families and saved them more than \$70 million in higher education costs. Our data-driven program assists students and their families in making more informed decisions to maximize the “return on investment” in education, and reduce the strain of student loan debt when they enter the workforce.

Senate Bill 135 offers innovative solutions to many of the challenges facing Ohio families when it comes to higher education. As mentioned in the Sponsor’s testimony, the higher education system was supposed to provide opportunity, a gateway from poverty to higher incomes, from bad neighborhoods to safe, insecurity to security. Instead it is proving itself to not even be a positive value proposition, but instead more reminiscent of a liability. With student loan debt at \$1.7T in this country, Ohio is now in 8th place among the most indebted states, holding back a generation from home buying, investing in retirement and even starting families.

At IN College Planning we’ve been tackling this problem for nearly the past twelve years here in Central Ohio. Senator Cirino's bill is getting right at the heart of the problem. We have to make education not just affordable, but valuable. Valuable to each student that seeks it to make sure it gets that particular student into the proper career path for them, and getting the right higher education model to get them there. Basically, SB 135 starts the conversation of making the turn into making college an asset buy, instead of a liability.

This bill looks to address one of the major concerns families preparing for higher education should consider- students entering four year institutions who end up taking much longer to graduate. At IN we help our students and families leverage the maximum amount of scholarship dollars and financial assistance from their chosen colleges and universities. What many of these folks don’t realize is that these scholarships expire after 4 years, leaving the alarmingly high percentages of students who do not complete their degrees within this time frame amassing massively higher debt than that for which they planned and anticipated. Addressing this on the front end through informed decision through career counseling and discussions regarding higher education options and alternatives can help our students solve this problem on the front end and position them for success after college. Given the wide range of options our students have for higher education, we should not look at the issue as “getting into college”, but rather, “getting through college” in such a way that students are able to secure their brightest futures--and in many cases save thousands of dollars along the way.

Another important aspect of the bill is what will allow our students to make these informed decisions. At IN we use data provided by colleges to help our students evaluate their career pathways, including internship and job placement rates, salaries in each field in the years following graduation, 4 year graduation rate, acceptance rate, overall costs between different degree programs at different institutions of higher education and many others. Accuracy and transparency in the data provided from higher ed institutions is critical. Sending students off to college is a highly emotional process, but it needs to also be driven by facts and data, as you would do with any other major financial decision like buying a house and planning for retirement.

The burden of student loan debt is not just a barrier to post-secondary education for many low and middle income families, it is a drain on society as more and more young Ohioans postpone home ownership, marriage, parenthood, and other major purchases and milestones. We must empower Ohio students to perform thoughtful, critical and analytical educational and career research, and provide them with the tools to identify and pursue educational pathways that will maximize salary expectations and career satisfaction, allowing them to be productive members of society.. As the child of a single mother who grew up in the HUD program and figured out how to put myself through college, helping young people successfully navigate this process is my passion. Thank you Senator Cirino for introducing this important piece of legislation. I am happy to answer any questions you may have and thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this afternoon in support of this meaningful piece of legislation.