

Senate Committee on Workforce and Higher Education

Testimony on HB110
Central State University

Dr. Jack Thomas, President
May 5, 2021

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Cirino, and Ranking Member Williams and members of the Senate committee on Workforce and Higher Education. I am Jack Thomas and I started as the new President of Central State University in July of 2020. However, I am no stranger to higher education as I served as President of Western Illinois University for over a decade and have been in higher education for 30 years. Joining me today are my Chief of Staff, Charles Shahid, my Vice President for Administration and Finance & CFO, Curtis Pettis, and my Senior Policy Advisor, Chris Widener.

Let me start by thanking Governor Mike DeWine, Chancellor Randy Gardner, and members of the General Assembly for your continued and steadfast support of higher education. As President of Central State University, I fully support the efforts of the IUC to advance support for 4-year, public higher education, and I join the other 13 universities in expressing our appreciation.

Central State University was founded in 1887. In 2012, the Ohio legislature granted Central State its long-awaited 1890 land-grant status. The designation as a land grant institution provides additional resources to Central State for teaching and research capacity in the areas of science, technology, engineering, agriculture, and mathematics (STEAM). Today, Central State University offers 36-degree programs across four colleges. We offer majors in areas such as Agricultural Education, Manufacturing Engineering and Sustainable Agriculture, Accounting and International Business, Criminal Justice and Political Science, – and Central State University is one of only four institutions and the only HBCU in the country to offer a degree in Water Resources Management!

Central State University serves a population of students who are 80% Pell grant eligible and come from lower, socio-economic backgrounds. 41% of our students identify as first-generation students meaning they are the first in their family to attend college. Even with full Pell grants and federal loans, the average unmet need of students enrolled at Central State is \$3,000 per student per year. Central State University and higher education in general are a proven and sound investment. We do an outstanding job at preparing students for careers and jobs right here in Ohio.

Upon arriving at Central State University, I immediately developed and shared nine (9) strategic priorities for the University, and they are as follows:

1. We will enhance and maintain compliance for our 1890 Land Grant mission through academic programing, cooperative extension, grants, research, and federal and state funding.
2. We will grow our enrollment by meeting prospective students where they are, exploiting the most modern and culturally effective forms of communication. We will continue by organizing and reinforcing existing administrative processes and exhausting every effort to provide excellent service to our various stakeholders. We will focus on being a student-centered university where every decision is made with the students' best interest at heart. With the national decrease in enrollment and subsequent negative impact on student financial aid, we must embrace a new approach to recruiting with a focus on diversity. We will find creative and engaging ways to showcase the talents, unique skills, and academic excellence of our academy.
3. With a combination of useful and productive technologies, we will greatly improve our retention and graduation rates by taking the time to implement innovative techniques like a robust early alert

system to truly understand where our students are falling short before it's too late.

4. We will develop an aggressive marketing and rebranding campaign that comprehensively defines our audience and establishes dominance and brand authority in our market. We will use the campaign to recruit and enroll more Ohio students and connect them to internships and careers upon graduation.

5. We will begin the groundwork for a multimillion-dollar comprehensive fundraising campaign and strengthen our donor relations by opening meaningful and prosperous dialogue around the impact of their generosity. The comprehensive fundraising campaign will support scholarships, faculty development, academic programs, instructional equipment, and facilities.

6. We will develop a bona fide Honors College that will be placed at the forefront of the University. We will recruit some of the best and brightest students that will help to enhance the overall academic profile of the University, focusing recruitment efforts on students with high ACT/SAT and grade point averages. I am excited to report that the Honors College is up and running. In fact, we have offered a total of five (5) presidential scholarships – four (4) to students right here in the state of Ohio. Presidential Scholarships provide full

tuition, fees, room, and board for 4 years!

7. We will transform our academy through increasing degree offerings, carving a niche in academic programs and identifying signature academic offerings. We will establish flexible course offerings including, online, weekend and hybrid courses. Ultimately, it is our goal to propose a school of graduate studies with prospectus for masters and doctoral degrees.

8. Our efforts to enhance retention will include strengthening the culture of our incoming and current students by building a new learning and living environment that includes new residents' halls and renovations of existing ones.

9. We will review the University's campus master plan to determine those facilities that we should forge ahead in seeking funding and establishing a timeline for construction, particularly those that are centered around our 1890 Land Grant mission with a focus on agriculture.

Our goals are ambitious and aggressive, and we will achieve them all.

Central State is the only 4-year, public university in Ohio located in a township and not in a city. This has created excess costs associated with Fire/EMS, water surcharges, and other service costs from nearby

municipalities and presents us with a unique set of fiscal challenges. The Coronavirus pandemic has changed the way we do business. Online classes, virtual recruitment, enrollment activities, reduced residential hall capacity, and limited extracurricular activities have become the new normal. Our general population is nearly 2,000 students on campus with the goal of enrolling 3,000 students. We are the most affordable public, 4-year university in the state of Ohio with tuition and fees of \$7,000 per year, and we have restricted tuition increases for many years, as directed by state legislation. The pandemic also forced our Governor and the General Assembly to make incredibly difficult fiscal decisions as it relates to public higher education, and specifically Central State University. The State Share of Instruction (SSI) was reduced by 4.6% (annualized); the Central State Supplement was reduced by 3.8% and our 1890 land-grant research and extension state matches were reduced by 5% each.

Central State University supports the IUC recommendation of a 1.8% increase in SSI in FY 2022 and FY 2023. Ultimately, the closer we could get to FY 2009 SSI funding levels, as supported by the Chancellor, the better for us all. We are also requesting that line 235-546, Central State Agricultural Research & Development and line 235-548, Central State Cooperative Extension Services, both be increased to match the projected federal awards.

Central State's Supplement is a critical part of funding provided by the State. It allows us to maintain our affordable tuition, to maintain a reasonable faculty to student ratio of 14-1, and to deliver quality academic services to students. As we continue to endure this pandemic, reduced Supplement funding will mean less mental health services, less counseling, and less career advisement. We thank the House for increasing line 235-514 to \$11,685,516 in FY 2022 and FY 2023. This equates to an increase of \$444,049 in FY 2022 and FY 2023 which restores the Supplement to its FY 2018 and FY 2019 "pre-cut" funding level. The Supplement has remained flat for 5 years with no adjustments for inflation and cost of living. Our additional ask is that the Supplement be adjusted with a modest 2.5% cost of living increase of \$292,137 each fiscal year.

In previous budgets, the Governor and the General Assembly have been gracious enough to match dollar-for-dollar the federal funds we receive to support our 1890 land-grant research and extension activities. Ohio is one of the few states that receives 100% matching from the state, and we appreciate your recognition of our designation. If Ohio chooses not to match the federal dollars we receive, we risk losing vital dollars used to support the citizens of Ohio. I also remind you that we continue to build our 1890 land-grant infrastructure while other 1890's have had a 100-year head-start. Our request is that line

item 235-546, Central State Agricultural Research and Development be increased by \$1,101,210 in FY 2022 and FY 2023, and that line item 235-548 be increased by \$1,340,000 in FY 2022 and \$1,334,673 in FY 2023. These requests for funding increases will ensure that our University emerges from the challenges of 2020 ready to not just survive, but to thrive!

We are not standing still at Central State University and looking back over our history and resting on our laurels. Higher education transforms lives and is a proven pathway to upward mobility. We respectfully ask for appropriate FY 2022 and FY 2023 funding that will allow us to continue educating our most important asset in Ohio, our citizens.

Again, thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education for all you do to support higher education in Ohio, and I am happy to answer any questions you might have.