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Senate Workforce & Higher Education Committee

Testimony on House Bill 110

Lisa A. Gray, President, Ohio Excels
May 5, 2021

Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 110 (HB 110). My name is Lisa Gray, and I am the President of Ohio Excels.

Ohio Excels is a non-partisan, non-profit organization created by leaders of Ohio's business community to more consistently and deeply engage the business community in helping to improve educational outcomes for all Ohio students. Our focus on education includes early childhood, K-12, and postsecondary. And, as part of that, we are committed to working with the broader business community, policymakers, educators, and other community leaders to support our students, educators, and schools.

I would like to highlight a few proposals within the budget that relate to our top priorities in workforce and higher education.

FAFSA Completion

Ohio Excels wants higher education – two and four-year degrees as well as technical programs and industry credentials – to be affordable and accessible to more Ohioans. The first step in that effort is making sure that more students fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Ohio Excels supported the Governor's move to make completing the FAFSA a new high school graduation requirement. We also think it was appropriate to allow parents to opt-out of the requirement if they wish. By changing the FAFSA to an opt-out rather than opt-in for students, it will significantly increase the number of students aware that they qualify for financial support. Ohioans leave approximately \$87 million on the table in Pell grants each year simply because they don't fill out the FAFSA. While this requirement was removed by the House, **we encourage the Senate to add it back into the HB 110.**

We know that a high school graduation requirement alone is not enough to move the needle on FAFSA completion. The requirement also needs to be accompanied by a completion campaign that offers professional development to educators to better understand the FAFSA and outreach efforts to help

communicate why completing the FAFSA is so important to students and families. The Ohio Department of Higher Education is currently implementing these supports this fiscal year using federal funds. **The General Assembly should dedicate \$2.5 million in each fiscal year to continue these statewide supports.**

Ohio College Opportunity Grant Funding

The cost of college and other training programs can be a barrier for many Ohioans. The Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG) is Ohio's primary need-based aid program for higher education – two and four-year degrees as well as technical programs. Before the great recession in 2008, the program received up to \$225 million a year. OCOG was cut dramatically after the recession, and it only started to recover in the last biennium. The General Assembly boosted funding to \$148.2 million for this fiscal year before COVID-19 related cuts. While HB 110 increases funding to \$108.5 million by the end of the biennium, **we strongly recommend restoring OCOG's funding for FY 2022 to \$148.2 million and increasing it again for FY 2023.** OCOG is a critical piece of the state's effort to increase educational attainment, lower college debt, and give more low-income Ohioans access to great job opportunities.

TechCred

To reach the state's attainment goal, we will need to upskill Ohio's current workforce. The budget continues and expands TechCred, the program designed to provide incumbent workers technology credentials aligned to Ohio's workforce needs. The budget allocates \$33.3 million in FY 2022 for grants to reimburse employers who connect employees to training providers. **Ohio Excels strongly supports this program and recommends that funding continue into FY 2023 as well.** Ohio's future economy is going to need more technology specialists and more technological literacy among all of its workforce to remain competitive.

Local Partnerships

Ohio is fortunate to have many local partnerships focused on increasing the educational attainment of their region. Called cradle to career partnerships (C2Cs), these collaboratives bring together education institutions, community organizations, and the business community to identify and implement collaborative initiatives to help improve students' success. However, only 17 of 88 counties benefit from these partnerships at this time. **Ohio Excels, as well as the Complete to Compete attainment coalition, recommend that the General Assembly include \$1 million in seed funding each year to create and expand cradle to career partnerships** to support students and families where they do not currently exist.

Other Higher Education & Workforce Provisions:

- Transcripts: The As-Introduced version of the budget gives the Chancellor the ability to set rules for when higher education institutions can and cannot withhold transcripts – a common barrier for students interested in continuing their education. Unfortunately, the House removed this provision. **We encourage the Senate to restore this rule making authority** so the Chancellor can help remove barriers and increase access for Ohioans
- College Credit Plus Eligibility: The budget allows the Chancellor to set alternative ways that students may demonstrate college readiness for College Credit Plus other than the ACT/SAT. **We support this change, and we hope that this will open up higher education opportunities to more students.**

In conclusion, Ohio Excels is excited about many elements in the budget proposal. Ohio Excels looks forward to continuing our collaboration with policymakers as they work to improve the lives of all of our students. If you have any questions, I can be reached at LisaGray@OhioExcels.org.