

Testimony from Nate Brandstater, President of Kettering College, on Senate Bill 135

Chairman Johnson, Vice-Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Williams, and Members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, my name is Nate Brandstater, and I am honored to provide testimony here before this committee today. In the next few minutes I am going to share with you some information that I hope will help you in your consideration of certain aspects of Senate Bill 135. I am the president of Kettering College, part of Kettering Health which provides health care and education services to the residents of southwest Ohio. We enroll approximately 800 undergraduate and graduate students in a variety of health care disciplines. Kettering College is a special place. Unlike The Ohio State University where the university governs the health care academic programs as well as the health care operations of the institution, Kettering College is a private, faith-based, health science focused, not for profit, regionally and programmatically accredited institution of higher education that is governed by our health care system. Now Mr. Chairman, I love this arrangement. Why? Because in my role as president, I am both an executive in and accountable in a very direct and concrete way to our most important industry partner, which employs over 14,000 Ohioans and hires about 75 percent of the nursing graduates from our college each year. I focus relentlessly on delivering value to our students, to our health care system, and to our community. Are we succeeding? Are our completion rates for our clinical programs above 85%? Licensure pass rates above 90%? Employment rates at 100%. Student loan default rates below 2%? Yes, yes, yes and yes. Actually, in 2015 The Brookings Institution conducted a Value-added study which attempted to isolate the contribution of the college to student outcomes. It is not a measure of return on investment, but rather a way to compare colleges on a more equal footing, by adjusting for the relative advantages or disadvantages faced by diverse students pursuing different levels of study across different local economies. In this study Kettering College ranked 1st in Ohio for value added and 16th in the nation, behind Harvard (technically we were tied with Harvard but apparently the institutions were listed in alphabetical order).

I would like to offer comments today regarding **Sec. 3333.051** of Senate Bill 135 which among other things directs the ODHE chancellor to approve bachelor's degree programs proposed by Ohio community colleges that meet the criteria of the section.

In 2019-2020, Kettering Health hired 506 new nurses. Of those, over 201 were hired with associate degrees. To prepare this testimony I asked a chief nursing officer in our system if she had any reservations about hiring nurses who had only an associate degree. The answer was no, as long as they earn a bachelor's degree within five years of hire. Now, Kettering College offers a bachelor's degree completion program for those nurses. It is an

online program. Anyone can take the courses from anywhere, as long as they have access to the internet. And the cost to an employee of Kettering Health for this program? Zero. Kettering Health pays for the entire program, which we deliver for less than \$5250 per year which means that the employee doesn't even incur a federal tax liability for the cost of that employee benefit. Why am I so focused on the value proposition to Kettering Health and our employees? Because the marketplace for bachelor's completion degrees is crowded and competitive. Even with a program that is free to our employees and is of first-rate quality nearly half of our eligible employees choose other institutions. Why? One simple reason is that they would prefer not to incur the employment obligation that comes with that benefit. They would rather pay out of their own pocket and be free to take employment opportunities elsewhere on their time schedules.

Now Mr. Chairman, notice I used the phrase "bachelor's degree completion program" to describe that program. We train new nurses in our "prelicensure" bachelor's degree program, which is our largest program at Kettering College. Is there a current nursing shortage in Ohio? Probably yes, at least for now. But Mr. Chairman, despite the substantial time and cost of the development and delivery of new bachelor's degree completion programs in our state, those programs will not add one new nurse to our state's workforce. The impact of these programs would simply be to shift costs of achieving an important organizational goal from a health care enterprise to the public. My experience has taught me that this is a cost that individual health care enterprises are willing to pay to attract and retain workforce talent and achieve their organizational goals. Although there are other reasons for me to advocate for the removal of the bachelor's degree provision in Senate Bill 135, what I have shared with you here is the most important information for me to provide you from my own direct experience as an executive of a health care college and a health care system in our great state of Ohio. Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to testify before this committee today. I would be happy to answer any questions you or your committee members might have.