

Testimony for the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee Presented by Katherine Fell, President, University of Findlay

Thank you, Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, for allowing me to speak with you today. I support your goal to provide access to higher education for more Ohio students. Please continue your good work in determining how best to do that. With that in mind, I ask that you consider two modifications to Senate Bill 135: (1) Avoid costly duplication when new bachelor degrees are proposed from any sector of higher education—whether 2-year public, 4-year public, or 4-year independent; and (2) hold all such applications to the same standards for approval.

Why Consider Alternatives to Duplication of Programs: Bachelor-degree duplication would require a large investment of taxpayer dollars based on the assumption that lower tuition costs alone would produce the results we all desire—a more educated workforce and a better quality of life for more Ohioans. I am not suggesting that 2-year colleges be kept away from all bachelor degree offerings, only that you carefully consider which programs are needed most. On the campus I know best, University of Findlay (UF), we offer 86 bachelor degrees. UF itself brings to the aid of students in these programs \$45 million dollars each year from our own budget and from private donations. In FY 20, students in these programs received a total \$3,451,093 in federal and state grants (inclusive of \$970,605 from OCOG).

More than 15,000 of our alumni live and work in Ohio, more than 5,000 of those in Hancock County and contiguous rural counties. Our annual economic impact is \$154 million into the local community and \$196.2 million into Ohio at large. That is a good return on investment for Ohio, and our students do well.

The average undergraduate net cost of tuition and fees per year at UF is \$14,897. The average undergraduate student debt upon graduation is \$24,620. The default rate is under five percent. This group includes students who are Pell-eligible, typically 27 percent of our students. Our completion rate is well above 60 percent, in line with that of the independent sector in Ohio, and many of our programs have gained high national rankings.

Our campus bears the full financial responsibility for starting and sustaining a bachelor degree program—the salaries of faculty and staff, the facilities, and any lab equipment needed. Lab science programs such as nursing, pre-veterinary medicine, and environmental safety are particularly costly. The assumption in the current SB 135 seems to be that since 2-year institutions deliver a less expensive per-credit-hour education per student per year, community colleges will maintain that low cost at the 4-year level. The student may indeed spend less than at a current 4-year institution, but the state of Ohio will spend much more to fill the gap.

Rather than duplicate bachelor degree offerings in areas where they are already available, please consider providing incentives that encourage partnerships between 2-year and 4-year campuses, like the one between Owens Community College and UF, called Oiler Express,

wherein students who are admitted upon acceptance at Owens can be admitted into both institutions simultaneously. Another example is students who apply for UF's online graduate health informatics program may take undergraduate pre-requisite competency courses, such as medical terminology, anatomy and physiology, and computer application, with nearby Rhodes State Community College.

Another promising alternative is to provide more generous support to Ohio students with financial need so that they can pursue the education they find best for them, whether at technical schools, 2-year publics, 4-year publics, or 4-year independents.

I am confident that most Ohioans would encourage these types of collaborations and mutual support – not deter institutions from working together towards a better Ohio for all of us.

Why Support Full Reviews by the Ohio Department of Higher Education:

As an independent institution in the State of Ohio, The University of Findlay must submit documentation to the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) outlining how proposed academic programs will meet expectations that align with the following:

- Qualifications of faculty teaching bachelor's-level courses
- Whether there will be saturation of academic offerings to the point one or more institutions will be unable to offer the program because of low enrollments
- Sufficient library offerings to support the academic offering
- Appropriate learning outcomes for courses and/or programs
- Thorough assessment plans
- Accurate feasibility studies leading to sufficient funding

Currently, the main submission UF is required to follow for ODHE approval follows the outline required by the Higher Learning Commission, with ODHE requiring supplemental documentation if the proposed academic program includes online delivery and/or an experiential learning requirement. Upon receipt of this documentation, ODHE determines if it will conduct an independent review of the academic program or if the ODHE will conduct its review in conjunction with the HLC review. In either case, ODHE personnel are making a determination to approve or deny the proposed academic program. The initial ODHE review leads to follow-up responses expected of programs for a minimum of three years after the initial approval.

Requiring a less rigorous ODHE review for 2-year colleges runs the risk of missing an important element in the future success of the programs at great expense and risk to the taxpayers of Ohio as well as the students in those programs.

In conclusion, let's work in collaboration, not in opposition, to offer more options for more Ohio citizens to gain the education they need to work and live with purpose and dignity.