

MUSKINGUM

U N I V E R S I T Y

Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee

Opponent testimony on Substitute Senate Bill 135

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May 26, 2021

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chairman Cirino, Ranking Member Williams, and Members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on Substitute Senate Bill 135 today. I am Susan Hasseler, President of Muskingum University. Like my colleagues, I support the Committee's goal to provide access to higher education for more students and to continue to meet workforce needs across the state. As I will share today, I believe Ohio higher education institutions are already effectively meeting those goals.

Muskingum University, located in the village of New Concord, Ohio in the Appalachian foothills is a comprehensive university with strong connections to the region, the state and beyond. Founded in 1837, the university serves approximately 2,500 undergraduate, graduate, and other adult learners. Eighty-six percent of the 1,300 students in our traditional undergraduate and over ninety-five percent of the 1,200 students in our adult learning programs are from Ohio.

As an institution serving a rural region where post-secondary attainment is low and workforce development is essential, we are actively partnering with two and four-year public institutions in our area to offer multiple paths for young people and adults to attain an appropriate post-secondary education. We have created a series of "stackable" programs that allow students to move seamlessly from College Credit Plus courses to two-year associate degrees to four-year bachelor's degrees. We have articulation agreements with over 15 community and technical colleges to facilitate this smooth transition. We offer educational programs in a wide variety of formats that meet workforce needs in our region including over 60 traditional four-year degrees, adult degree completion programs, and certificate and graduate programs. With generous aid packages and careful cost containment, we are one of the most affordable independent institutions in Ohio, offering the smaller class sizes and individualized support that many first-generation students need at a comparable cost to public four-year institutions.

In addition, Muskingum University plays a key role in the economic well-being of our region. A recent economic impact study noted that the university brings over \$50 million in revenue to our region annually through our own use of services as well as attracting others to the region for athletic and cultural events. With our strong commitment to partnering with local business and industry, our latest new project, an integrated Health and Wellness Complex, will not only support healthcare workforce development and bring new business and industry to the region, but has already poured over \$12 million into the local economy around the building project itself.

The fiscal health and well-being of Muskingum University matters greatly to our community, our region and beyond.

We believe we are already effectively meeting the goals outlined in Sub. SB 135. Muskingum maintains close connections to workforce needs in our region, offers affordable, accessible and flexible programs, and partners with two year and technical institutions. A primary example of the way in which we meet the SB135 goals are our nursing programs, which offer multiple paths to attaining a four-year nursing degree.

In 2008, in response to the clear need for more nurses in our region, we began a pre-licensure BSN program which has since graduated 148 students with an excellent, well-rounded education, a 100% pass rate on the NCLEX licensure exam, a number one state and national rating from multiple professional organizations and accolades from the healthcare institutions that hire these students. *Over 90% of these students have remained in our region, many serving the healthcare needs of rural populations.*

However, in response to feedback from regional healthcare providers, we also designed an RN to BSN program launched in 2009 which has since prepared 188 nurses to receive the BSN degree. *Well over 95% of these students remain in and serve our region.* Some distinctions of this program include:

- Partnerships with local healthcare providers with corporate tuition support.
- Articulation agreements with regional ADN programs offered at 10 two-year colleges.
- Pathway for graduates of the growing number of RN diploma programs to enter our BSN completion program currently maintaining articulations with five of them.
- *The Step 1,2,3* program to help lower the cost of completing the BSN degree with special tuition pricing.
- Obtaining competitive grants, such as the *Choose Ohio First* grant, to provide scholarships for our students in STEMM disciplines, including nursing.

In 2020 we launched an Accelerated Nursing program which has already enrolled 15 students who completed bachelor's degrees in other areas and want to complete a BSN degree. We are continuing to explore other opportunities to support the nursing profession including a seamless CCP to ADN to BSN program and graduate nursing educator programs. *The only constraint on our goals for growth will come from the very limited human and clinical site resources necessary for implementing new nursing programs.*

Some additional facts to consider:

While today, both nationally and regionally, there is a shortage of RNs:

- The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services projects that by 2030, Ohio's supply of RNs will likely **exceed demand** by more than 49,000 FTE's. Nationally, this is second only to Florida. Passage of Sub. SB 135 could easily accelerate this surplus in Ohio.
- According to regional healthcare providers, a proliferation of new nursing programs in Ohio could have the unintended consequences of causing an imbalance in the ratio of experienced RNs to novice RNs, as experienced practitioners leave the bedside for the classroom.
- Overwhelming the availability of clinical practice sites, a resource that is already stretched to capacity, is a genuine concern.

Ohio already has a wealth of opportunities to enter the nursing profession.

- The Ohio Board of Nursing (OBN) website lists 107 approved RN programs in the state, including 44 two-year ADN programs and 14 diploma programs. These two year and diploma programs both allow successful candidates to sit for the RN-NCLEX test.
- There are also 44 baccalaureate RN/BSN programs in Ohio. These prepare pre-licensure candidates to sit for the professional exam and simultaneously to earn a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree. Muskingum University offers one of these baccalaureate RN/BSN programs.
- The OBN reports that of the 107 programs in the state only four exceeded their enrollment capacities in 2020, likely attributable to a lack of qualified nursing faculty and an insufficient number of clinical placement sites to accommodate a growing number of programs. The other programs have room for additional students.

Nursing programs take a significant investment in facilities and personnel. Accreditation requirements for these programs are rigorous and extensive. Duplication would be both costly and inefficient for the state when the need can already be met through independent institutions that receive no direct state funding and those state institutions that have already invested heavily in excellent programming and facilities. This duplication could also negatively impact the institutions that play an essential role in the health and well-being of their communities.

In summary, the existing tapestry of diploma, two-year and four-year institutions in Ohio is more than adequate to prepare enough nurses and the workforce in general to serve Ohio in the future. Partnerships among these institutions are robust and growing. Students from current four-year nursing programs like those offered by Muskingum University stay in Ohio and serve rural and high need populations. Access issues can be addressed through creative partnerships like Choose Ohio First, models like our Step 1,2,3, program, and additional state funding and incentives for attending nursing and other high need workforce development programs. Expensive duplication is neither necessary nor desirable as we seek to use every dollar effectively to support economic development and sustainability in Ohio.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to update this committee on the important work happening at Muskingum University. I appreciate your time and attention today and for your

tireless service on behalf of all the citizens of Ohio. I would be happy to answer any questions that the committee may have at this time.