

Good afternoon Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee. My name is Akii Butler, I am 24, and a graduate of Kent State University. Thank you for the chance to testify on Senate Bill 135.

I stand before you today because I feel it is important to let you know about the negative effects that transcript withholding can have on students like me. Many times, we are told that the best way to make a better life for ourselves is to attend college and that is exactly what I did.

Graduating was one of the best feelings I have ever had.

I felt so accomplished, but little did I know that feeling would fade quickly because I had an unpaid student account balance. I soon began to feel like a failure, and had to put my dreams of going to law school on hold.

I struggled to get a job right out of college, had to work low-paying fast-food jobs, which made it impossible to make payments on my account balance of \$4995.44 due to a Perkins loan that came from the institution itself. To make things worse, the debt was turned over to the AG's office for collection, although I was able to avoid the immediate crisis because my loan servicer added the debt to my student loan. Many students don't have this option, and get trapped in unpayable debt that spirals out of control.

Schools in Ohio withhold official transcripts for students and former students who owe them money, which makes everything worse. We can't access the transcript that will help us continue our education or get a job that pays better.

The earlier version of SB 135 would have eliminated the transcript trap for university students like me by banning transcript withholding as a way to get students to pay back their debt. But the version you're considering now doesn't help. While an employer may be able to get a student's transcripts as the bill is currently written, it only creates more hassle for them which, in turn could cause someone to miss out on an employment opportunity due to the employer not wanting to wait or make the extra effort. That means people will miss out on jobs and still won't be able to continue their education and get a better-paying job. As a result, they won't be able to pay that debt and get stuck -- they owe more than they originally did and no one gets paid. This issue is currently a lose-lose for everyone, and I think it's time we change into a win-win.

Banning transcript withholding by schools is the best solution. That way students can finish their education, get a better job, and be in a position to pay back what they owe.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.