



**Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors**

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Testimony of Martin Kich, PhD  
Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors  
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee  
Senator Terry Johnson, Chair  
June 2, 2021

Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Williams, and Members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

My name is Martin Kich. I am President of the Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), which represents more than 6,000 college and university faculty across the state at both public and private institutions.

First, I want to commend Sen. Cirino and his office for their openness in engaging in conversations with many stakeholder groups, including ours, about this legislation. The substitute bill represents a resolution of some of the concerns that we had with the original bill, and we appreciate the efforts to ensure that Ohio faculty will continue to have uninhibited academic freedom. As this process continues, we hope that we will continue to be able to find common ground that will improve higher education in a way that allows for student success, affordability, quality education, and financial stability of our institutions.

Transparency and Transcripts

We support the ideas in the bill that promote transparency, especially in regards to instructional and administrative spending, because there is too little being spent on student education while administrative spending has soared. The prevailing assumption is that a university education is expensive because of faculty salaries and benefits; but the reality is that, on average, Ohio universities are spending just 20% of their budgets on instructional salaries. However, we would be wary of creating duplicative reporting requirements or ones that have the potential to add more administrative bureaucracy at our institutions. More than transparency, we have to find ways to encourage institutions to refocus resources on the instructional mission.

We preferred the original version of this bill that would have prohibited the withholding of student transcripts when a student has outstanding debt at an institution. This practice is holding back students from pursuing further education, completing a degree, and gaining employment, which ultimately would help them pay back the debt that is owed. It also disproportionately impacts lower-income students and demographic groups that traditionally have had less access to postsecondary education.

OCOG Supplemental Awards

We can appreciate the idea behind the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG) supplemental awards in this legislation. An additional financial boost to help students finish a baccalaureate degree could increase overall attainment in Ohio. However, we are concerned that, without additional OCOG funding, this has the potential to limit overall OCOG awards, which cumulatively may reduce access for lower-income students.

### Community Colleges Offering Bachelor's Degrees

We support the current model in Ohio higher education that allows community colleges to offer a bachelor's degree program when there is a demonstrable need that is not being fulfilled by a nearby university. We are concerned with expanding beyond that and having community colleges divert from their core mission, which they do well. We believe the legislature should be supporting all levels of public education to do their jobs thoroughly.

Consistently, we have heard complaints from legislators about program duplication within regions. Allowing community colleges to offer bachelor's programs will exacerbate duplication. Instead of allowing community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees because they are more affordable than universities, we should be addressing university affordability. It's time to talk seriously about trimming the fat in administrations, athletics, and other non-academic spending.

### In Conclusion

SB 135 has caused quite the stir in Ohio higher education, and that isn't such a bad thing. While we may not support the bill on the whole, we can appreciate the conversations that the legislation has generated, and the way that it has given us an opportunity to engage with members of this committee to give our perspective on important issues at our colleges and universities. If it is the prerogative of the committee to advance the bill in some form, we hope that you will bear this testimony in mind and continue to work with us to make improvements.

We believe that, in all discussions of higher education, the focus should be on how to support the instructional missions of our institutions. Faculty-student interaction is the essence of higher education and its success. One thing has become clear during this pandemic: students, by and large, want to be in the classroom with their professors and peers to learn. Ohio's faculty are proud of the role that we play in preparing students to enter the workforce and to be good citizens.