

**Testimony of Dr. Karen Bjorkman,
Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs at The University of Toledo
Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Substitute Senate Bill 135
June 2, 2021**

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, My name is Dr. Karen Bjorkman, Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs at The University of Toledo. I appreciate the opportunity to present interested party testimony on substitute Senate Bill 135

I want to first thank the sponsor, Senator Cirino, for considering creative ways to drive down student debt and to increase post-secondary accessibility and attainment for Ohio's students. I also want to thank him for his openness and willingness to collaborate with higher education stakeholders, in particular Ohio's public universities, to discuss alternative considerations and ways to improve the goals this legislation sets out to accomplish, as we believe there remain provisions in the bill that need additional attention.

We still have concerns with the provision that would allow the state's community colleges to offer any type of bachelor's degree, including nursing degrees. The belief that a bachelor's degree will be offered at a lower cost simply because it is delivered by a community college will likely not be the case. Non-applied bachelor degree programs, and especially nursing programs, are high-cost endeavors to undertake, costing millions of dollars to set-up and maintain, along with a sometimes multi-year accreditation process. Couple this with the costs of hiring qualified faculty and these factors will drive up the price of the program, a price that will be passed on to students and their families. We support the current authorizing law, understanding that in certain instances there is a regional need for applied bachelor's programs that fits within the mission of our community college sector. Given the number of both public and private 4-year institutions in the state as well as the declining number of college-aged students over the next decade in Ohio, it is not financially prudent to continue to increase bachelor's degrees offered at community colleges.

Another provision of the bill, which puts prohibitions on the recruitment of out of state students, could have significant negative impacts. As The University of Toledo and other Ohio public universities look to expand enrollment in the face of a declining pool of high school graduates in the state, we collectively should be looking at ways to incentivize non-Ohio residents to move to our state and become permanent Ohioans. While UToledo's undergraduate student body is comprised of nearly 80% Ohio resident students, our close proximity to Michigan and Indiana provides an opportunity to attract students into our programs, but not at the expense of Ohio students. Ohio's public and private

universities attract a large number of students from out of state, helping Ohio to maintain a strategic economic development advantage. To accomplish this, we need to have maximum flexibility in attracting the best and brightest students from across the country and around the world.

The provision dealing with price setting for online courses, which requires that special fees charged for an online course at a state institution of higher education, if applicable, be based on the actual demonstrated cost incurred by the institution to provide those courses, also causes us concern. While there were some clarifying changes made to this provision in the substitute version of the bill, the fundamental concern remains the same, in that public universities do not necessarily have reduced costs when they offer online courses. A university must still pay for technology tools and platforms, faculty development, instructional designers, and student support staff in the case of programs that are fully online. Fees are assessed to pay for those additional costs.

Differences and concerns with these and other provisions in Senate Bill 135 are not insurmountable. We believe that with the Committee's and Senator Cirino's willingness to continue the dialog and work on these issues can further improve the legislation, and make a true impact on college access and affordability.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony, and I greatly appreciate the work this committee does on behalf of higher education.