



**BEFORE THE SENATE WORKFORCE & HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**SENATOR TERRY JOHNSON  
CHAIR**

**TESTIMONY  
OF  
DR. ELIZABETH SAYRS  
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND PROVOST  
OHIO UNIVERSITY**

**JUNE 2, 2021**



**OHIO**  
UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND PROVOST  
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June 2, 2021

Dear Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Ed Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the committee on substitute Senate Bill (SB) 135 bill. I am grateful to Sen. Cirino for his willingness to collaborate with higher education partners to help insure access and affordability to post-secondary education for more Ohioans. Ohio University offers a full range of associate's, bachelor's, graduate, and professional degrees across its main, regional, Cleveland, and Dublin campuses. More than 30 percent of our undergraduate students are the first generation college students. Increasingly, we are focused on meeting the needs of employees with stackable certificates and professional credentials. Recognized as the best online college in Ohio by [onlinecollege.com](http://onlinecollege.com), Ohio University has a deep catalogue of online courses and programs, including our highly successful RN-to-BSN program for working nurses. We offer an extensive portfolio of more than 60 online programs at both the undergraduate and graduate level and more than 1,000 online courses. For 10 consecutive years, OHIO has been named a military-friendly school by G.I.Jobs. We are committed to meeting the lifelong learning, workforce, and professional development needs of adult Ohioans.

OHIO's longstanding commitment to student success has enabled us to improve our retention and graduation rates. In academic year 2019-20, Athens main campus undergraduates retained at 81.3% and 65.9% graduated within six years; in addition, our four-year graduation rate has increased 5 percentage points in the last five years. Regional Higher Education students on our five regional campuses retained at 56.4%. Twenty-seven national public research universities were identified with a similar profile to OHIO (ACT middle 50% from 20-22 to 25-27). Using 2019 (latest available) retention rates, OHIO ranks fourth among those peers. While Fall 2019 to Fall 2020 retention rates were likely impacted by COVID, all groups except those who are both Pell-eligible and First generation have seen increases in retention since Fall 2016.

Ohio University's Community College Partnership Program was created in cooperation with community colleges to support affordable alternate pathways to a four-year Ohio University degree and are both fundamental to the access mission of the institution and the degree attainment goals of the State of Ohio.

At the core of the partnership model is Ohio University's ability to provide clear and concise pre-admission planning tools and academic advising that can be utilized by students prior to applying to Ohio University. These assets allow for students to plan seamless academic pathways and to avoid the potential loss of any academic credit or time towards degree completion which can amount to substantial financial savings.

At this time, OHIO has 37 signed memoranda of understanding with community college partners in seven states, 19 of those community college partners are in the State of Ohio and we've developed

more than 289 advising guides and pathways that serve students enrolled at those community colleges.

An example of how these partnerships lead to affordable degree attainment is OHIO's Strategic Transfer Education Program (STEP). The STEP program was designed in cooperation with our community college partners and provides an advantage to current and future students from those colleges who are planning to earn bachelor's degrees at OHIO. Program participants plan for a successful transfer to OHIO through advising activities, social and cultural opportunities, and satisfying academic requirements. Benefits of the STEP program include:

- Guaranteed early admission to Ohio University, provided requirements are met
- Personal on-site transfer advising
- Degree planning to ensure timely graduation
- Ability to guarantee transfer and applicability of coursework toward OHIO degree
- Communication regarding transfer planning tips and information about Ohio University news and events
- Financial savings and cost predictability at the University through The OHIO Guarantee. *Through this initiative, students participating in STEP lock in a four-year tuition, housing, dining, and fee rate prior to enrolling on the Athens campus.*

In 2015, Ohio University was the first public university in the state of Ohio to launch a comprehensive fixed tuition and fee program, and the OHIO Guarantee remains one of the most transparent and all-encompassing of its kind. The program was designed to take the guesswork out of budgeting for college through a cohort-based, level-rate tuition, housing, dining and fee model that assures students and their families a set of unchanging, comprehensive rates for the pursuit of an undergraduate degree at OHIO.

Tuition, housing, dining and fee rates established at enrollment remain unchanged for four years (or 12 consecutive semesters including summers). Students pay a pre-determined amount per semester for the first year, and for the next three years. The OHIO Guarantee applies to all degree-seeking undergraduate students at Ohio University. This includes both first-year and **transfer** students, regardless of campus of admission or enrollment. Recently expanded as OHIO Guarantee+, the program also now includes a graduation plan guarantee that helps control the cost of college by ensuring that students graduate on time and on plan, as well as lifelong alumni benefits.

OHIO's community college partnership model serves a diverse range of students and the wide variety and modality of programs offered by OHIO provides great flexibility, regardless of their current life circumstances. Coursework earned at a community college can be applied directly toward traditional campus-based degrees or to one of our many online degree programs. The combination of community college tuition and our already very low Ohio Online tuition structure provides a pathway for one of the most affordable quality 4-year degree offerings in the State of Ohio.

Offering 4-year degrees at college community college would run counter to the 30+ years of work and resources that the State of Ohio and public institutions have applied to transfer policy in process. Due to this work, OHIO's guaranteed transfer pathways already provide a vehicle for students to earn affordable 4-year degrees at any of the 4-year public institutions in the State of Ohio.

The implementation of 4-year programs at community colleges would include a substantial investment of administrative and instructional overhead and would create inefficiencies and unnecessary duplicity of degree offerings with 4-year institutions. This plan also begins to blur the lines and missions of the important roles that both community college and universities play in the State. Each type of institution has distinct but complementary opportunities to support workforce development, meet the needs of industry, and achieve the State's degree attainment goals. Each type of institution also serves the unique needs of the regions where they are located, and in many cases, the two types of institutions also serve the State efficiently and most effectively by supporting and complementing each other's offering.

An important aspect to an institution's ability to provide a well-rounded and transformative learning experience is the diversity of the student body. Maintaining the discretion to determine the composition of the student body is critical as the geographic diversity lends and contributes to a greater range of ideas and perspectives. That integration or assimilation of students from across the country—and indeed, from around the world—is an important component of the rich learning experience that Ohio University students and Ohio's employers value alike.

A majority of students who attend Ohio University hail from the Columbus, Cincinnati and Cleveland metro areas. Ohio University, as well as most other 4-year institutions in the State, has the capacity to enroll all qualified undergraduate students.

Enrolling non-resident students also contributes to Ohio's economic development, serving to import talent that can contribute to the State's economy upon graduation. The projected decline in the population of Ohio high school graduates will make non-resident student enrollment desirable in the attainment of enrollment and revenue goals. Additionally, many institutions along state lines have historically served non-resident students, and the Ohio Legislature has created policy that allows those non-resident students to receive the benefit of in-state tuition, making a degree, and the potential that a student will stay within the state borders and contribute positively to the economy, all that much more possible.

Regional campuses provide the mission of affordability and accessibility of higher education to students in Southeast Ohio and beyond. The campuses have provided access to the excellence that is a hallmark of Ohio University's academic programs for over 70 years. The lower tuition rates and open access admission criteria provide both traditional and non-traditional age students the ability to receive a high quality and affordable degree while staying close to home. Students in grades 7-12 can begin taking college courses at the regional campuses as part of the College Credit Plus program. Participation in this program provides the opportunity for students to earn college credit during their middle and high school years which saves costs in their overall college education. In addition, the regional campuses provide options for non-traditional age students to begin taking courses or return to college to complete a degree. Many of these students might otherwise not have the ability to go to college if there was no regional campus in their community due to family and work responsibilities. The regional campuses offer that affordable and accessible education option for non-traditional age students as well as traditional age students. In addition to the traditional educational opportunities that are central to their mission, regional campuses are also utilized for community engagement and workforce development initiatives that strengthen community relations and the economy. The regional campuses serve as the higher education and cultural hub for communities throughout Southeast Ohio. In addition to for-credit educational offerings, many non-credit educational opportunities are available to the community as well. These types of offerings provide an alternative route for individuals to enhance their knowledge

for personal fulfillment or to upskill for the workforce. Many area employers partner with regional campuses to provide training and educational opportunities for their employees. Regional campuses serve as strong partners resulting in a positive economic impact to their communities. They are positioned to continue to be the drivers of educational, social, and economic development.

To address the current challenges in the higher education landscape and to create a plan for sustainability, the regional campuses have fully aligned their administrative and academic operations with a one university system-wide approach with the Athens campus. They have identified and implemented efficiencies across all the regional campuses through the coordination of academic and administrative services. In addition, they have identified the potential for new revenue streams through the extension of existing degree programs from the Athens campus and the creation of new and in-demand degree programs to meet the regional workforce needs. This system-wide approach to operations provides a strong pathway to the sustainability for providing educational opportunities to the Southeast Ohio regions.

The Ohio University Foundation was established in 1945 by supporters of Ohio University including and encouraged by then-President John C. Baker. Its mission then, today, and tomorrow: “Philanthropy in Support of Education.”

For more than 75 years, gifts from generous donors have provided for scholarships and financial aid packages, research and faculty development, capital expansion and renovations, technology upgrades and lab equipment, library acquisitions, and vital unrestricted support that has allowed Ohio University to meet unexpected challenges.

Philanthropy—through The Ohio University Foundation and partnership with donors—will continue to play a critical role in Ohio University’s mission to provide students with transformational educational experiences.

The Ohio University Foundation supports the policy goals reflected in the “donor intent” language of Sub. SB 135. Broadly, it would seem that the intent of the legislation’s language is a policy by which donor intent is met for all endowments, and donors have a clear understanding of how their gifts will be used. However, we respectfully submit that these policy goals already are codified in the Uniform Prudent Management of Institutional Funds Act (UPMIFA)— which has been adopted by 49 states—and are reflected in The Ohio University Foundation’s practices. In fact, The Foundation has been recognized with a [GuideStar Platinum Seal](#) for its transparency. Information on The Foundation’s [spending policy](#) is available online as are The Foundation’s most recent [financial statements](#).

As written, the bill weakens a donor’s ability to designate how donations will be used in perpetuity by giving the donor’s family and professional administrators the right to reinterpret the donor’s intent after the donor’s death. This presumes that a donor’s interests were the same as those of the donor’s surviving family members and professional administrators. This could, inadvertently, undermine donor confidence and the ability of Ohio’s charitable organizations to secure crucial endowment support in the future.

In addition, as written the provision revises UPMIFA’s uniform “irrebuttable presumption of prudence” for appropriation for expenditure in any year of an amount not greater than five percent of the fair market value of an endowment fund to a “rebuttable presumption of imprudence” for expenditure in any year of an amount greater than seven percent. This language would seem to

suggest and reflect a negative perspective—a “presumption of imprudence”—of Ohio’s charities and their relationships with donors, rather than a positive perspective and reflection that presumes partnership and good faith in support of organizations and their missions.

What’s more, the State of Ohio Attorney General provides regulatory oversight of Ohio’s charities. The provision would remove the Attorney General as the authority to enforce a donor’s intent and replace it with the donor’s surviving family members and professional administrators. This, again, undermines donors’ agency.

Finally, under Sub. SB 135 as written, the donor intent language would apply to all charitable institutions in Ohio, not just public colleges and universities. This would result in a significant burden on all of Ohio’s charities, which will be forced to respond to the challenges and demands of each donor’s family members and professional administrators in perpetuity.

The newly proposed revisions to UPMIFA statutes are unnecessary in that they undermine a donor’s right to be the exclusive voice in designating how donations are used; depart from the nationally accepted standard of having states’ attorneys general enforce donor intent; and impose a drastic increase in administrative and litigation expenses for all of Ohio’s charitable institutions.

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony and for your continued service to the state of Ohio and its citizens.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Sayrs". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elizabeth Sayrs, Ph.D.  
Executive Vice President and Provost