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House Finance Committee

Testimony on House Bill 33

Lisa Gray, President

Ohio Excels

March 29, 2023

Chair Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, my name is Lisa Gray, and I am the President of Ohio Excels. Ohio Excels is a non-partisan, non-profit organization created by leaders of Ohio's business community to engage the business community more consistently and deeply in efforts to help improve educational outcomes for all Ohio students. Our focus includes early childhood, K-12, and postsecondary education. And in support of that mission, we are committed to working with the broader business community, policymakers, educators, and other community leaders to support our students, educators, and schools.

Ohio Excels and our business partners believe the Governor's proposal is an exceptionally strong start to the state budget process. It includes policies that address the most pressing issues and target the most impactful strategies for helping students graduate ready to succeed and making higher education more affordable and accessible. Since my time is limited and we have a lot to share, I have appended our full list of priorities to this testimony. I hope you will take a look at these. I am going to focus my testimony today on areas where we think improvements can be made.

Early Childhood Education Eligibility

We believe that the state should make high-quality early childhood education opportunities available for more children and their families, especially for students who are economically disadvantaged. These opportunities will give students a strong foundation for learning and allow parents to return to the workforce. A recent [Groundwork poll](#) found that 68% of Ohio moms with children under five who do not currently work full time say they would go back to work if they had access to high quality and affordable childcare. It also found that 80% of Ohioans believe the state should increase funding for childcare. While HB 33 does increase the income threshold for publicly funded early childhood education opportunities from 142% of the federal poverty level to 160%, we believe it should expand to include more children and families. **We believe the income threshold for publicly funded early childhood education opportunities should rise to 200%**, which is \$53,000 for a family of four.

Literacy

We are excited early literacy is a priority for the Governor and his budget proposal and believe that nothing is more important than helping our children to become strong readers. The proposals to align materials to the science of reading, provide professional development and stipends for educators, and support literacy coaches for low-performing schools will help many more students read at grade level. While we support this historical investment, we also believe it is important to make sure our teacher candidates are properly prepared in the science of reading. The proposed budget currently requires the Chancellor to review all educator preparation programs for the literacy curriculum they use to train potential educators. However, we think the budget should go further. **There should be a requirement that (1) all teacher preparation programs align their literacy instruction with science of reading strategies, (2) and program approvals be contingent upon preparation programs demonstrating strong alignment.** New teachers should not have to be retrained by our K-12 schools because the college education they paid for does not adequately prepare them to successfully teach all our students to read.

Charter School Funding

We support the continued implementation of years three and four of the Fair Funding school funding formula as proposed by the Governor. We also support the additional per pupil funding for high-quality charter schools and the increase in the facilities funding for all brick-and-mortar charter schools. However, even with those changes, the average public charter school receives approximately 25% less per pupil in overall public funding than comparable school districts. The ability of districts to raise revenue from local taxes puts charters at a disadvantage in recruiting and retaining effective educators and offering enrichment opportunities for students. **We believe that all brick-and-mortar charter schools should receive an additional \$1,000 per pupil equity supplement to help close this gap and improve educational opportunities for the children whose families choose these schools.**

FAFSA Graduation Requirement

Our state's future success hinges on more Ohioans earning high-value credentials and postsecondary degrees. The budget makes important investments in making all types of higher education – technical training, two-year colleges, and four-year universities – more affordable for students. The first step for all of these education options is completing the FAFSA, a form that students opt-in to completing. The budget changes the FAFSA from an opt-in to an out-out by establishing the FAFSA as a graduation requirement. It is important to note that the requirement comes with an opt-out provision that any parent or administrator can use, so no student will actually be denied a diploma. However, this will help Ohio students capture some of the [\\$108 million in federal assistance](#) being left on the table just because students did not complete the FAFSA. Yet in order to make this initiative successful, our school counselors and community organizations need additional support. **We believe the budget should include a grant program that – in coordination with the state-level efforts of ApplyOhio – provides funding to local and regional organizations to support school counselors, engage families, host events, and work to ensure more students complete the FAFSA.**

Regional Partnerships

Ohio currently has Regional Education Partnerships covering 20 counties working to successfully drive educational attainment for our children and families. These collective impact initiatives involve a variety of community stakeholders – such as educators, employers, community organizations, and philanthropies – who collaboratively work together to achieve agreed-upon metrics in their communities across the education continuum from early childhood through workforce. These partnerships have made significant progress in establishing themselves by piloting and expanding work to impact student success, career awareness, graduation readiness, and transitions to postsecondary education and training. Financial support was provided in the last General Assembly through HB 169, but it was not included in this budget. **We believe that the state should support these current partnerships and support new ones to operate in unserved areas of Ohio. We respectfully request an investment of \$5 million dollars in the biennial budget to support this critical work.**

As I mentioned earlier, I encourage you to review the other proposals Ohio Excels and our business partners support in HB 33. Thank you for your time today, and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.