



Testimony before the House Higher Education Committee
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Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Ohio
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Thank you, Chairman Young and members of the House Higher Education Committee, for allowing me to testify in support of House Bill (HB) 462 on behalf of Ohio's independent, nonprofit colleges and universities and their students. My name is C. Todd Jones, and I am President and General Counsel of the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Ohio (AICUO).

AICUO represents 51 non-profit institutions of higher education across the state. Our members educate 116,000 students and award one-third of the baccalaureate degrees in Ohio each year, as well as an even higher share of our state's degrees in mathematics, natural biological sciences, and other key areas of study.

HB 462, introduced by Representatives Troy and Brennan, would recreate the Student Choice Grant Program, which was eliminated by the Strickland administration to pay for a tuition freeze at public institutions.

As I am sure the committee knows, tuition at Ohio's public institutions is artificially discounted because the state provides operating dollars through the State Share of Instruction. In fact, Ohio's public four-year institutions received \$3.24 billion dollars in the state's last operating budget. Ohio's independent institutions received zero taxpayer-funding for the operation of our colleges.

The Student Choice Grant would allow Ohioans who have lived in the state for two years to receive a grant to attend an independent college. The money would be used **ONLY** by the student for tuition and fees.

Independent colleges are a vital part of our state's workforce ecosystem. Our hundreds of thousands of graduates help fuel Ohio's economy.

Independents offer unique areas of study and at times innovate before their public peers. Data sciences and analytics is a major area of study today but the first program in Ohio was at Case Western Reserve University. The sole programs in petroleum engineering and petroleum geology are at Marietta College. If you want to work in NASCAR or other racing industries, the only motorsports marketing program is at the University of Northwestern

Ohio. Life sciences illustration is a field in increasing demand, and yet the only degree program in Ohio is at the Cleveland Institute of Art.

Other programs help keep students in Ohio. If you want a degree in toxicology and do not want to attend a massive state institution, Ashland University is your only choice. Agriculture is the state's number one industry. If you do not want to attend OSU, your only choice without the student choice grant may be to leave the state. In the alternative, you can study agriculture at Wilmington College, or one of the excellent equine science programs at the University of Findlay, Lake Erie College, or Otterbein University.

Many students want to attend an institution that provides a faith-based educational experience, something the public is not allowed to provide. Similarly, the hundreds of students each year who want to spread the word of God can only study ministry at independent colleges.

Our institutions also offer students the ability to continue their sports careers. While everyone would love to be a Division I superstar on TV every Saturday, that is not the reality for the overwhelming majority of Ohio's student-athletes. Division II, III, and NAIA colleges provide that opportunity for tens of thousands of athletes.

As you can see in the graph below, even through the pandemic, students want to attend Ohio's independent institutions.

Students Want to Attend AICUO Institutions

Applications grew by 33 percent over a decade

Average number of applications to AICUO member institutions



Note: Open admission institutions have been excluded from the dataset
Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System



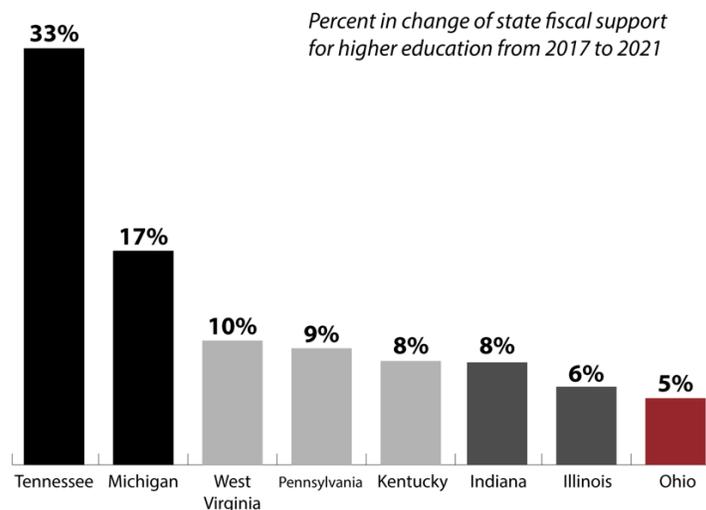
Our institutions are also located in many parts of the state that other four-year opportunities are not. Many students do not want to move to Columbus, Cleveland, or Cincinnati to continue their educational experience.

Being in every region of the state, independent colleges and universities provide the economic backbone for numerous communities and are key partners in many more. As you are all aware, Ohio has a population stagnation problem. Outside of the growth of the Franklin County bubble, many areas in Ohio are facing serious threats to their way of life with declining and stagnating populations. We need to encourage more Ohio college students to stay, and the Student Choice Grant can encourage that.

Ohio's funding to support and build a modern, educated, and trained workforce is 44th in the entire country. Again, 44th. We need to use every means we can to train and retain that workforce, and flirting with the bottom of the funding list is not a path forward.

Ohio 44th in Increasing Higher Ed Fiscal Support

Ohio also remains last in region in creating an educated workforce



Source: Statista. (2023). 5-year percent change in U.S. state fiscal support for higher education from fiscal years 2017 to 2021, by state.

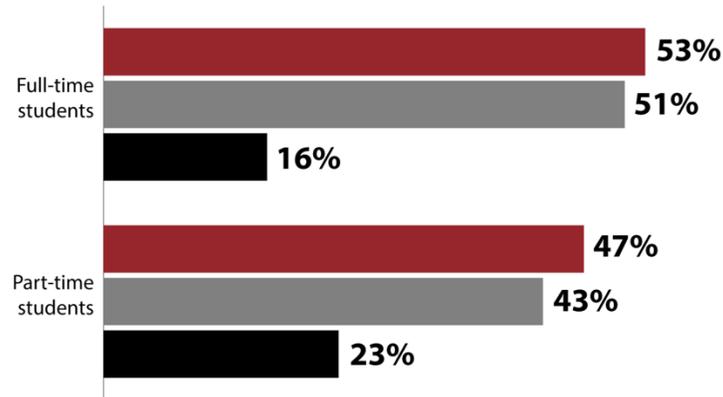


Ohio's independent college institutions are also honored to talk about the work they do to graduate their students. The goal should not just be to enroll; the goal MUST be to help each student complete their post-secondary education. AICUO institutions lead the sectors in graduation rates and do so without any taxpayer-funded subsidy. There is no future workforce for the state if the students do not graduate.

Ohio Independents Lead in Graduation Rates

Average undergraduate award (degree and certificate) completion rates enrolled at Ohio institutions by enrollment status and sector

- AICUO independents
- Ohio public four-year main campuses
- Ohio community colleges



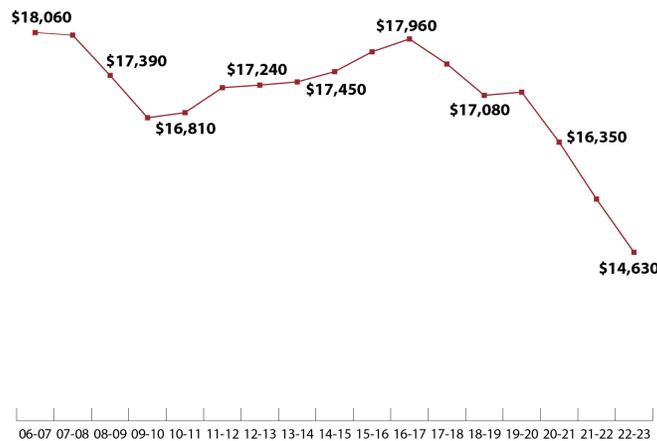
Note: Full-time student graduation is at a six-year rate; Part-time student graduation is at an eight-year rate
 Source: IPEDS Outcome Measures. (2021).



AICUO members are proud of the work they are doing to attract, retain, and graduate Ohioans, all while keeping the cost of attending an independent institution lower than it was 20 years ago. I know this goes against the national narrative, but in Ohio we are working harder than ever to remain affordable and competitive.

Independent Higher Ed More Affordable Than Ever

Average net tuition and fees by academic year, adjusted for inflation



Source: CollegeBoard. (2022, October). *Trends in College Pricing and Student Aid 2022*.



We believe the state's goal should be ensuring that each potential student (whether a high school senior or an adult learner) finds the right place for him or her. If as a state, we can ensure that students are at the right place for them – rather than politically dictating a right or wrong path – only positive things will happen.

HB 462 will not only aid Ohio's economy by helping our best and brightest remain in Ohio after graduation but also provide students the CHOICE of where they want to attend and what type of education they want to receive. We just need this committee to invest a small amount of funding for students, and we will deliver a large return on that investment.

Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.