

Testimony of President Rodney K. Rogers
Bowling Green State University
Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education
HB 33
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Chair Manning, Ranking Member Jarrells, and members of the Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education, it is an honor to be here with you today.

I am Rodney Rogers, and I serve as the president of Bowling Green State University.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of House Bill 33, a transformative student-focused budget, with a 3% increase in State Share of Instruction, a formula that is performance- and outcomes-based, empowering universities to graduate their students on time.

House Bill 33 also calls for more support for low- and middle-income Ohio families through the Ohio College Opportunity Grant, and, an expansion of the Super RAPIDS program to include funding for institutions to strengthen education training opportunities for workforce development.

Attracting talent is critically important to our state's economic future, and Ohio is fortunate to have so many public and private universities, educating not only Ohio's current and future students, but students from across the nation, and world.

This bill, and the increase in SSI and OCOG is absolutely an investment in Ohio's economic future. BGSU serves students from every county in Ohio, including the three Cs. Many of our students are first generation. When you look across all our student populations, many rely heavily on federal and state dollars. Going to college is not a given for these students – but they work hard, often exceeding expectations, and when they graduate, they grow businesses, pay taxes, have families, buy homes, improve communities, and make our state, and our economy stronger.

As president of one of Ohio's public universities, it is absolutely our responsibility to ensure we are good stewards of public funding. These are performance-based investments, and there is accountability in providing an education of value, offering the right academic programs, and supporting students so they can graduate on-time and ready to enter the workforce. Every day, we work to earn the trust of our students and families, and, the taxpayers of Ohio. I would like to spend my time today sharing how we do that.

A public education should be available to all – and BGSU provides support, preparation and pathways for all Ohioans who have a desire to earn a four-year degree. We work with community colleges across the state, as well as our own Firelands College, to create opportunities for students to be successful.

It is our responsibility to ensure we are supporting our students – and we know the transition to college is a big one, especially that first year. It comes with a significant financial investment, and decisions that can impact students for the rest of their lives.

That is why we have launched the Life Design program at BGSU. Using design thinking, and modeled after a program at Stanford University, BGSU offers every incoming student the opportunity to learn a process that has been used by the private sector for years to drive innovation and creativity.

Students are empowered and supported, helping to stay on-track to graduate in four-years or less and minimize student debt. Students also develop critical “life skills” to design their life post-college, which is especially important as many graduates’ career paths will evolve from where they started, working in industries that may not even exist today.

BGSU is a high research institution, with nationally ranked research programs including I-O psychology, population science, photochemical science and supply chain management. BGSU’s research is pragmatic and relevant to today’s world, with faculty working in partnership with the public and private sector to advance discovery around pressing topics – including water quality, especially in the western basin of Lake Erie, supply chain and the onshoring of manufacturing, sustainability, the use of big data, photochemical sciences that harness the power of light, and developing new approaches to support the development of human talent (our most valuable resource).

Our research goes to market. Sateletics, Inc., one of the most successful startups in northwest Ohio’s recent history, came from geospatial and analytics research conducted at BGSU. With its geospatial analytics software, the rapidly expanding business helps industries such as oil and gas, pipeline, power, mining, rail and water and wastewater avoid major environmental issues.

Economic and regional development are closely linked to education, and we are working with the state to ensure our research, academic programs, and partnerships are aligned with Ohio’s current and future workforce needs.

For example, a few years ago, when then-Attorney General Mike DeWine shared there was a need for a new crime lab in northwest Ohio, BGSU provided land for a crime lab, which also allowed us to create a forensic science program. Today, that is one of our fastest growing programs, and it provides critical support for a safer, and more just Ohio.

When Ohio-based Cedar Fair, LLC needed the next generation of leaders for their organization and their industry, we jointly developed an academic program in resort and attraction management, that is now drawing students from across the U.S. to study in Ohio and often will stay in Ohio after graduation.

BGSU is one of the few universities in the nation with an airport on its campus – and there is a great need for more pilots. We partnered with a private company, NorthStar Aviation, to expand our facilities and we now have the largest aviation program in the state. We have also recently

launched another partnership with Republic Airways, which operates under its major airline partner brands of American Eagle, Delta Connection and United Express, to provide a direct pipeline for our students to enter the workforce.

Our state, and country, needs nurses, and health care professionals to care for our aging population. We partnered with Mercy Health to grow our nursing program and it continues to expand, year after year.

Because Northwest Ohio has the largest concentration of robots focused on manufacturing in the nation, our most current initiative is focused on advanced manufacturing and engineering, which is in the midst of a technological evolution. Intel's investment and LG/Honda's investments highlights this incredible growth potential.

BGSU has leveraged its prime location along the I-75 corridor to create the Center for Advanced Manufacturing. We are working with large and small manufacturing and logistics companies in northwest Ohio to support their workforce needs, and BGSU has partnered with the University of Findlay, a private 4-year college, and Owens Community College, to streamline our academic offerings and research capabilities, effectively and efficiently, through this Center.

These initiatives and partnerships have allowed BGSU to fight heavy headwinds in terms of enrollment and retention. Over the past several years, BGSU has increased retention and graduation rates of our students, growing the number of out of state students who come and stay in Ohio, increase enrollment in our hybrid and on-line programs, and experienced strong and stable overall enrollment. Last year we had a 7% increase in our first-year class, and we are tracking a double-digit percentage growth in this fall's first-year class.

It is our responsibility to ensure BGSU is a worthwhile investment – for our students, families, taxpayers, private donors, and supporters – who trust in us and believe in us.

As a BGSU graduate myself, I absolutely believe in the power of education. I am a sixth-generation Ohioan, from Kenton, and I am also a first-generation college student. 50 years ago, I certainly never would have believed, that today, I'd be here talking with you. Higher education changes lives and provides virtually unlimited opportunities to live the American dream.

I ask that you support the higher education budget, keeping it intact, and supporting BGSU in our work to create public good for Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony today, and I am happy to take any questions.