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Proponent Testimony – House Bill 33 State Operating Budget

Chair Manning and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education, thank you for allowing me to submit written proponent testimony on behalf of our university. I am Neville Pinto, President of the University of Cincinnati, and I write to share our support of the Governor's operating budget proposal.

The University has now completed five years of our strategic direction, Next Lives Here, with strong outcomes toward our vision of leading urban public universities into a new era of innovation and impact. We serve as an integral partner for our state and region for research, economic growth and workforce development. Foundational to all our work is our commitment to providing a world-class education for our students. We are preparing them for a future that is digital, accessible and inclusive. Our Bearcat Promise is a commitment to each student that they leave campus upon graduating with a diploma in one hand and a clear path to a career or further education in the other.

We are thrilled with the progress we have made through Next Lives Here. Enrollment has reached a record 48,000 students, and our incoming classes have never been more academically prepared or more diverse. We will continue the strong momentum in all areas of our work: academic excellence, urban impact and our innovation agenda. The strong partnership we have experienced with Governor DeWine and the General Assembly has allowed us to grow our mission to reach even more students and impact our community more deeply. The budget proposal before you accelerates our work, providing resources for us to scale what we are already doing.

University of Cincinnati students graduate workforce ready. Our nationally recognized cooperative education (co-op) program provides students with an opportunity to gain real-world experience, build their resume, earn an income and connect with potential employers as a component of their education. This learn-and-earn model results in more than 7,500 co-op placements each year with over 2,500 employer partner organizations in 46 states and 30 countries. Just last year, UC students earned \$75 million in wages through experiential learning. Our commitment to career-connected learning has culminated in the creation of a new College of Cooperative Education and Professional Studies. We are innovating new ways to work with employers to upskill and reskill their current workforce by recognizing professional work experience with college credit. We are advancing their knowledge, skills and abilities so they can in turn advance their careers.

next lives here

An affirmative action/equal opportunity institution

I will take this opportunity to address several themes in the budget that align strongly with our mission and share how we expect the investments from the state to enhance our work.

Affordability

There are many components in Governor DeWine's budget that improve affordability for Ohio students. There are two main factors on which I will focus. The first is the State Share of Instruction (SSI). The state's partnership with public institutions like the University of Cincinnati through SSI is primarily an investment in affordability for our students. In 2014, when the state moved to the tuition cap and guarantee model, we have worked diligently to exercise restraint on our operations and provide our students with transparency and predictability when it comes to the cost of their education. The modest 3% per year increases to SSI proposed in the budget is the most critical tool for us as an institution to hold down our costs. As a public university, we are stewards of public resources and of the public's trust. We have worked diligently, even as we have now seen a decade of consistent enrollment growth to remain lean, nimble and innovative. We strongly support the increase to SSI and encourage its preservation in the bill.

The second major item addressing affordability is the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG). The first, and most apparent, change House Bill 33 makes to OCOG is significantly investing more state resources into Ohio's need-based scholarship program. The other change that is less noticeable is the expansion of eligibility to more of Ohio's middle-class families. The new formula would offer OCOG to families with an average adjusted gross income of \$87,000, meaning more students will become eligible for aid they would not have previously qualified for. The budget also makes OCOG more flexible for students, expanding its use to cover additional expenses like textbooks, which previously were the student's responsibility. We believe these changes will have lasting effects on Ohio students and families for generations to come and urge adoption of both the increase in funding and the expansion of eligibility.

Access

The second major theme I would like to address is robust access to postsecondary education. We know that pursuing higher education is a key for citizens to increase their economic mobility over the course of their life. Opening pathways to education for those that are otherwise excluded can significantly alter the trajectory of an entire generation. At UC, we are proud of the work we have done to increase admissions for first-generation students, who now make up a quarter of our total enrollment. We not only admit them, we also surround them with support services they need, including academic advising, mentoring, career coaching, community connection and much more. Our vision is to continue growing our total enrollment to 60,000 students by 2030. A significant growth opportunity for us are potential students for whom college was previously unattainable.

Accessibility and affordability go hand in hand, which is why we support increasing need-based aid to students. Governor DeWine and Chancellor Gardner also included increased need-based aid for students attending community colleges, and, for the first time, regional campuses like UC Clermont and UC Blue Ash through the College Access Grant Program. Our

regional campuses serve vital roles in our community and economy. They can open doors for adult learners, provide affordable options for local students to pursue an associate degree, or even create a pathway to a baccalaureate degree with direct admission to Main Campus once they complete their studies at the regional campus. Our regional campuses are also valuable engines for producing in-demand workforce. For example, we have developed an associate degree in engineering technology that will produce workers to fill roles at the new Intel facility in New Albany. That is just one example of the myriad programs we have available on our regional campuses. We would greatly appreciate additional support for more students to attend these campuses and advance their educational and economic opportunities.

Another priority for educational access is a coordinated, state-led effort to get more high school students to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The proposed Apply Ohio program aims to increase completion for our students so they are aware of all federal funding available to them through grants, work-study opportunities or low-interest loans. Recent estimates have concluded the 39% of Ohio students not completing FAFSA results in \$87 million in federal support that our students do not access. Moving our state to a required FAFSA completion with an opt-out for students will greatly improve this outcome for Ohio students.

Lastly, we support the efforts to close the educational attainment gap through line items like the ASPIRE Program. We are significantly expanding our adult educational opportunities and welcome those who are looking to improve their skillset. We use ASPIRE funding to support our Cincinnati Talent Acceleration Program in partnership with Microsoft and local companies. The more of our citizens we can give the tools they need to become marketable for our businesses, the more impact we will make on our economy and community.

Workforce

Ohio's economic tide is rising—businesses are locating here, companies are growing, new innovations are going to market, and we are writing a new chapter in the story of our state's prosperity. We are acutely aware, as we know you are, of the deep demand for talent in the state. Employers are constantly connecting with us and recruiting our students essentially from the moment they step foot on our campus. We have worked with JobsOhio and our partners to accelerate the completion of STEM degrees from UC by twofold, a goal for which we are currently ahead of schedule. A main factor in our drive to increase to 60,000 students by 2030 is precisely because the need for talent is so great. We are encouraged by the inclusion of several programs in Governor DeWine's budget proposal that will help us widen our pipeline of graduates into in-demand career fields.

There are a number of existing initiatives being expanded in this budget. We have been longstanding supporters of the Choose Ohio First scholarship and thank Lt. Governor Husted for his visionary leadership in this effort. We support increases in that program for more students to pursue STEM educational opportunities. Similarly, expanding the need-based aid program for short-term certificates to include regional campuses will allow us to scale our work in this space. We are a proud partner of TechCred and look forward to growing our relationship with employers to upskill their workforce.

There are new programs that we are also excited to see proposed. We look forward to working with Chancellor Gardner and the Administration on their new WorkFORCE Ohio program to increase opportunities for in-demand career pathways. The Internship Pilot Program aligns strongly with our commitment to experiential learning and cooperative education. And the Super RAPIDS proposal will build on the success we have already seen in RAPIDS with a monumental investment of new resources. We are ready, willing and able to partner with businesses and other educational institutions to deliver the kinds of collaborative solutions needed to train the workforce of tomorrow.

Finally, there are two programs that will increase our ability to produce top-flight medical talent for the state. Our Clinical Teaching funding and Area Health Education Center line items each see modest increases. Our College of Medicine is the preeminent medical school in our region. With our recent national experience during the Covid-19 pandemic, we know just how valuable medical professionals are in our state. We strongly urge you to maintain these slight increases in our funding so we can continue growing these programs.

Student Support

Another critical component exposed during the pandemic is the mental health support services our students need to persevere through trying times. There has arguably never been as much pressure on our students as there is now. We have increased the investments we make in all student support services, but mental health remains one of our highest priorities. The funding Governor DeWine is requesting will connect students with care they need and deserve on our campus and across the entire state.

In conclusion, the budget before you in the House of Representatives is a generational investment into higher education in our state. We are on a path to grow our mission, serve more students, impact our community and expand our economy. We look forward to deepening our relationship with this Governor and General Assembly over the next biennium and for many years into the future. The University of Cincinnati is pleased to recommend favorable consideration for the higher education components of this budget. We are here to serve as a resource for the greater good of our state.

Sincerely,



Neville G. Pinto
President