



**Sponsor Testimony – Senate Bill 64**  
**Ohio Senate Finance Committee**  
**March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, members of the Senate Finance Committee: thank you for giving Senator Wilson and me the opportunity to testify today on Senate Bill 64. When I joined the 135<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, I knew I wanted to tackle issues of substance and profound impact. Not only does Senate Bill 64 uplift our Guardsmen and women, but it also reinvests in their civilian careers, keeps Ohio tax dollars in Ohio while supporting Ohio service members, and strengthens the Guard's recruitment and retention. Senate Bill 64 is the result of long-standing need to increase our Guard's educational benefits to out-perform or meet surrounding states and stop the brain drain that is occurring.

For those of you unaware, the United States Army missed its recruitment goal in fiscal year 2022 by 25% or 15,000 Soldiers. For comparison, the entire Ohio National Guard Force strength is a little over 17,000 Soldiers and Airmen. Further, that's an entire Division in the Army. It is as if the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Screaming Eagles, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, or entire Ohio Army and Air National Guard ceased to exist. Not only is this a national security concern, but it is also something the Ohio General Assembly and National Guard can provide guidance on in improving recruitment and retention through educational incentives.

Currently, under the Ohio National Guard Scholarship Program, enlisted Ohio Guardsmen and women can accrue 96 credit hours toward a bachelor's degree in the state of Ohio for a six-year service obligation. Senate Bill 64 as written would incentivize current contracted members to extend their service with the Ohio Guard to a total of nine good years of drilling to accumulate 32 additional credit hours, allowing a lifetime maximum of 128 credit hours. This would alleviate current personnel who are struggling to complete their bachelor's degree since the current language does not fully cover an entire degree—121 credit hours at let's say The Ohio State University. Further, knowing how competitive the 21<sup>st</sup> century labor market is, the bill would expand the scholarship to pay up to \$750 per credit hour toward any graduate degree—that's up to \$96,000 for an officer, warrant officer, or enlisted Soldier who hasn't used any of his or her scholarship towards a bachelor's degree and already possesses one. Finally, of those who have used some of their eligibility credits but have some remaining, they will rollover and be eligible for the expanded degree usage and of course have the re-enlistment, 32 credit hour incentive at their disposal.

It is truly my honor and pleasure to introduce this important legislation to make the Ohio National Guard the most-educated, militarily readied, and financially secure in the country. With the train derailment in East Palestine to COVID related readiness initiatives to responding to historic floods and natural disasters, the Ohio National Guard continuously shows us why this reinvestment is needed, important, and worthy. Our Guardsmen and women deserve the world, and this is just one step in that direction. The bill's language truly levels the playing field in educational incentives,

allowing **all personnel** to continue their higher education. An investment in all of our Guard, rewarding officers, senior non-Commissioned officers, and warrant officers, isn't just good policy, it speaks to the values and morals of Ohioans that service matters—that sacrifice is seen and rewarded. The utility, skills, and knowledge gained to the Guard units from their Soldiers and Airmen and women completing higher degrees are immeasurable. Much like with Governor DeWine's request for the high school merit scholarship to retain high performing high schoolers in Ohio universities, we know the potential of our good-standing Guard personnel, thus attempting to bolster retention will lower the demand on recruitment and allow us to recruit the best trainees from the region and retain the best performing personnel we currently have.

Senate Bill 64 caps the graduate level costs so that we can maintain fiscal responsibility over the scholarship, it levels the playing field for those who already have bachelor's degrees, and it shows the value of service and sacrifice. Senate Bill 64 is bipartisan, pragmatic, and right for Ohio. It is Senator Wilson, our cosponsors, and my pleasure to present it before all of you today. The Ohio National Guard are "Always Ready, Always There!" And they truly are Ohio's Best! Thank you for your time; I am open to any questions you may have regarding the language.

**Senator William P. DeMora**, 25<sup>th</sup> State Senate District