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Senate Finance Committee

Testimony on Sub. House Bill 33

Lisa Gray, Ohio Excels

June 8, 2023

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Lisa Gray, and I am the President of Ohio Excels. We are a non-partisan, non-profit organization created by leaders of Ohio's business community who are committed to helping improve educational outcomes for Ohio's students. I'd like to highlight a few of the most important changes in the Senate's substitute bill and a few ways that it could improve even further to help our students succeed.

Literacy

We are excited that literacy is a priority in this budget proposal and believe that nothing is more important than helping our children to become strong readers. **We would like to thank the Senate for restoring the funding levels to this critical initiative**, especially the funding to ensure educator preparation programs are aligned to the science of reading. Furthermore, Ohio Excels is pleased to see the Senate restore the retention component of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee in the substitute bill. Ohio Excels released a [new study](#) that shows the immediate and long-term academic benefits in reading and math because of literacy-based retention. This shows that retention is an important piece of a comprehensive literacy improvement strategy, and **Ohio Excels applauds the Senate's commitment to helping students read at grade level.**

Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG)

Ohio has fallen behind neighboring states in need-based aid for students. OCOG is ranked dead last right now among Midwestern states – states we compete with for talent and business. While we appreciate the Senate adding more funding to OCOG than the House, the substitute bill's other changes to OCOG still place Ohio behind all of its neighbors.

Ohio Excels recommends the Senate:

1. Increase the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) to \$10,000 to make higher education within reach for more Ohio students;
2. Raise the maximum award amount to \$6,000 by the end of the biennium, which makes Ohio more competitive in the region but still behind states like Indiana and Illinois; and
3. Return the funding levels to the Governor's proposed \$337M over the biennium.

Fully funding OCOG will help the program achieve the state's goals of giving more students a choice to attend a school that fits their needs, reducing the number of students who graduate with significant debt, helping low-income students lift themselves out of poverty through higher education, and making Ohio more competitive by closing our workforce gap.

Charter School Funding Equity

The average public charter school receives approximately 25% to 35% 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 our students. **We believe that all brick-and-mortar charter schools should receive an additional \$1,000 per pupil equity supplement to help shrink the funding gap.**

Early Childhood Education

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. While we ultimately believe it should be at 200%, **we are asking the Senate to return the income threshold for publicly funded early childhood education opportunities to 160%.**

The Senate made many positive changes with its substitute bill, and I would like to quickly share our appreciation for the following three provisions:

1. **Education Governance: Ohio Excels strongly supports the creation of the Department of Education and Workforce.** We believe this will allow for bold leadership and clear lines of authority at a time when our students need help the most.
2. **Computer Science:** Ohio Excels would like to thank the Senate for maintaining the **Computer Science Promise program and allocating \$4M for Teach CS**, which will help expand the capacity of schools to offer critically needed computer science courses.
3. **FAFSA Support Teams:** Ohio Excels is pleased to see the Senate's commitment to making higher education more affordable by creating a \$1M per year grant program to **implement a statewide system of FAFSA support teams** that will help school counselors, engage families, host events, and work to ensure more students complete the FAFSA.

Thank you for your time today, and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.