

Senate Finance Committee Testimony
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Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of Senate Bill 182. I am Cassie B. Barlow, the President at the Strategic Ohio Council for Higher Education (SOCHE). I'm speaking to you today from the perspective of a Workforce Development professional who works on behalf of Ohio Higher Education institutions and students every day. Much like the State of Ohio, it is SOCHE's desire to assist students in attaining Higher Education credentials. Our mission at SOCHE is to be the leader for higher collaboration, engaging with colleges, universities, K-12, and industry to transform the economy through education and employment. We accomplish this mission every year by hosting professional development for hundreds of faculty and staff as well as internships for hundreds of students.

The Ohio economy is booming, with close to three hundred new employers moving to our state in the last year. Based upon these increases, Ohio faces an urgent and growing need for highly skilled, credentialed workers. These new companies and all their associated partners are asking for Ohio Colleges and Universities to increase programming in many occupational areas and are expecting increased numbers of graduates. It is well known across the State of Ohio that our numbers of students in school are decreasing based upon demographics. Based upon these demographic projections and the projected demand, it has never been more important in Ohio's history, for more students to enter our Higher Education institutions and to complete their degrees. Ohio's postsecondary attainment is not keeping pace with the needs of business and industry, leaving a significant gap between employer needs and worker knowledge and skills. This well-documented "talent gap" threatens our state's continued economic competitiveness and growth. The Ohio Bureau of Labor Market Information projects that between 2018 and 2028, 75% of job growth in Ohio will be in occupations requiring at least a postsecondary non-degree credential, and 58% of growth will be in occupations requiring a degree.

The current degree attainment rate for Higher Education degrees in Ohio is 49.5%. Although our state is making steady progress, we are more than 2% less than the national average. This very important bi-partisan bill will help to increase Ohio's attainment rate while giving our State's foster children a better chance at attaining degrees and receiving living wage jobs. Only 3% of our foster youth in Ohio attain a degree after having 80% of our foster youth attend college. This critical scholarship will assist Ohio in closing the talent gap across the State. All Ohioans deserve a chance to achieve their dreams and earn well paying jobs while contributing to our thriving economy.

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to present testimony in support of Senate Bill 182.