

Introduction and Ohio's Economy | Bob Savage – CoreNetwork Fund and Toledo Tomorrow

Chair Stewart, Vice Chairman Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Finance Committee.

My name is Bob Savage, and I was born and raised in Toledo. I am the Founder and President of Toledo Tomorrow, which is a college and career access non-profit with the goal of providing more opportunities in Toledo and Northwest Ohio. I also am the Founder and CEO of Savage Consulting and the Core Network Fund. I have experience in both the for-profit and non-profit sectors, which gives me the unique perspective to comment on why education has never been more important in creating a talented workforce and strong economy.

As a coalition, we support an “all of the above” approach to post high school education. Simply put, we need to significantly increase the number of Ohioans with four-year degrees, two-year degrees, and industry recognized credentials. Proposed programs in the Governor’s budget help us attain more postsecondary degrees. We strongly support providing aid for students at community colleges through the Work Ready Talent Ready Grant Program, but we will use our time today to focus specifically on increasing postsecondary access, affordability and completion of four-year degrees.

According to an Ohio Excels 2020 report, Ohio needs nearly one million more adults with high-value credentials and post-secondary degrees to keep up with employer needs and to keep the state’s economy moving.

This shift toward occupations associated with higher education levels is well documented. Perhaps, what is not widely understood is the importance that four-year degrees play in our economic transformation. According to the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services’ 2030 Ohio Job Outlook Employment Projections report, 54% of net job growth is anticipated in occupations associated with some form of post-secondary education. **42% of job growth will require a bachelor’s degree or higher.** Just 19% are expected to be in occupations typically associated with a high school diploma.

Top 10 Ohio Jobs: Training Requirements and Current Openings

Occupational Title	Education Requirement	Require Postsecondary Training	Current Openings
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	No formal educational credential		17,182
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	High school diploma or equivalent		15,212
Industrial Machinery Mechanics	High school diploma or equivalent		2,257
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	Postsecondary non-degree award	☑	9,311
General and Operations Managers	Bachelor's degree	☑	6,020
Medical and Health Services Managers	Bachelor's degree	☑	1,709
Software Developers and Software Quality Assurance Analysts and Testers	Bachelor's degree	☑	5,239
Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	Bachelor's degree	☑	3,246
Registered Nurses	Bachelor's degree	☑	7,993
Nurse Practitioners	Master's degree	☑	1,095

Data Source: Ohio Jobs Outlook 2020-2030 and Ohio's Top Jobs List (Governor's Office of WorkforceTransformation)

As is outlined in the written chart in my testimony, 7 out of the top 10 in-demand jobs in Ohio today require some postsecondary education. Six of them require a bachelor’s degree or higher and there are more than 34,000 job openings in these fields right now.

The current and increasing demand for postsecondary degrees is clear. However, we are not producing these degrees at the required rate we need. The chart in my written testimony shows the gap in Northeast Ohio, data that is annually collected and reported by Team NEO, a JobsOhio affiliate.

As you can see, in 2023, there were more than 45,000 openings across Northeast Ohio in the IT, health care and engineering sectors, openings that typically require a two- or four-year degree. Yet, the region’s higher education institutions only awarded 15,600 credentials in those fields – resulting in a dramatic misalignment between demand and supply.

Northeast Ohio 2023 Job Demand vs. Credentials Awarded

Occupation Group	Total Demand	Credentials Awarded	Alignment
Computer & IT Workers	11,068	3,453	-7,615
Health Diagnosing & Treating Practitioners	31,077	6,464	-24,613
Health Technologists & Technicians	13,424	2,660	-10,764
Engineers	5,376	3,032	-2,344
Total	60,945	15,609	-45,336

Investing in access and affordability will position Ohio as a leader, giving families the ability to choose what education path is best for them and giving them the tools to afford it. It will also boost our workforce pipeline, giving Ohio businesses the skilled workers they need to meet their demand.

Higher Education Affordability | Dr. Michele Scott Taylor – College Now Greater Cleveland

Chair Stewart, Vice Chairman Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Finance Committee.

My name is Dr. Michele Scott Taylor, and I am the CEO of College Now Greater Cleveland. College Now is the oldest and one of the largest college access organizations in the nation. We provide services to 38,000 students and adults in 80 school districts in 6 counties. We are grant-funded to serve low-income students and have a fee-for-service model for moderate- and high-income districts that we serve. Every day, we work with students who want to enter meaningful careers that require post-secondary education.

For the past 20 years I worked in the higher education space, where I focused on career and college advising, access and affordability, and helping break barriers for students. I’ve seen firsthand that these families often don’t have the resources or knowledge to navigate the complicated post-secondary landscape.

I want to focus my comments on the most important piece of Ohio’s financial aid system – the Ohio College Opportunity Grant Program or OCOG.

We applaud the Governor and the Ohio Legislature for the incredible work on the last budget to significantly increase both the award amounts and the eligibility threshold for students to receive OCOG. This has made a significant difference for many students in Ohio and have helped students leverage other scholarship dollars like those that College Now provides.

It is worth noting, however, while the maximum award for OCOG has increased 60% (\$1,200 dollars) over the past 4-years for students attending full-time, in the same time frame, the cost of attendance for these

students has risen 10% (\$2,831 dollars). While the OCOG percentage increase has outpaced the cost percentage increase by 50%, there is still a significant gap in actual dollars students must cover. The increase in OCOG currently only covers 43% of the total rise in cost. The cost of attendance has risen \$2,831 dollars but the maximum award amount has only risen \$1,200, leaving students with \$1,600 dollar gap. *(source: ODEW Fall Survey Tuition and OCOG website with award history)*

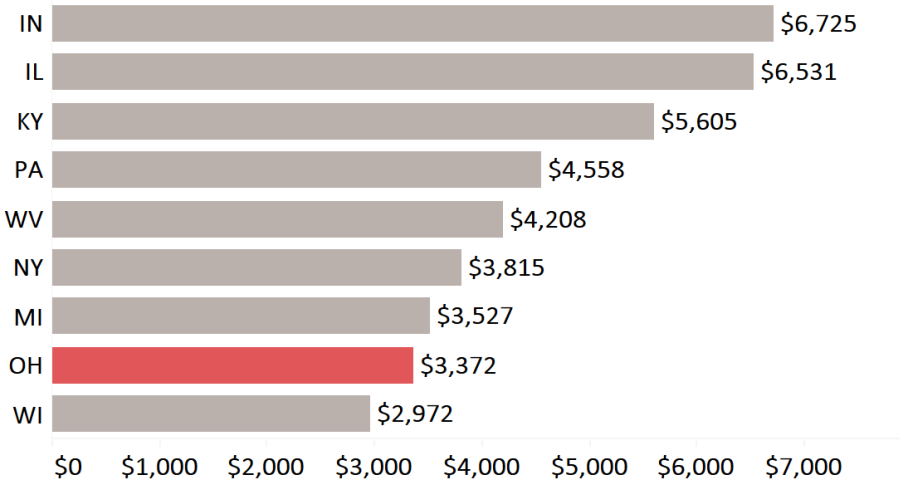
During the 2023-2024 school year, the state average for the cost of attendance at a 4-year public institution was \$30,200. After deducting a full Pell grant of \$7,398 and a full OCOG grant of \$3,200, a federally subsidized loan of \$5,500 – students still faced a deficit of \$14,102 to cover room, board, books, a computer, or any of the fees like health insurance and lab fees. Some students receive institutional aid, others work, often two jobs, many students do all of this to help offset the costs and avoid debt.

					Average Ohio Public Cost of Attendance: \$30,200	
Pell		OCOG		Federal Loan	Total Aid	Cost covered by student:
\$7,398	+	\$3,200	+	\$5,500	= \$16,098	(\$14,102)

OCOG is the difference for many students between going and not going to college and from taking on a debt burden that prevents them from making important investments in their long-term financial health such as buying a house or even deciding to start a family.

Ohio ranks sixth in the nation for college enrollment. We are a powerhouse for college enrollment, and and we need to keep students here. However, we need to be more competitive with other states in awarding students financial aid to attend our institutions. As seen on the chart in my written testimony, we remain almost last among our Midwestern peers in average aid per student. Worse than that, **currently Ohio ranks 45th nationwide in average aid allocated per student.**

Average State/Local Aid given to First-Time Full-Time Students in 2022-2023 by State of Institution



Data Source: IPEDS First-Time Full-Time Financial Aid Awarded 2022-2023

The Governor’s proposed budget slightly increases the OCOG total allocation, but more needs to be done to remain competitive. This is an area of investment that will pay dividends for decades in workforce development and wealth building in Ohio.

Access and Affordability | Emily Broughton – Bottom Line Ohio

Chair Stewart, Vice Chairman Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Finance Committee. My name is Emily Broughton and I am the Director of Development and External Relations at Bottom Line Ohio. We are the third and most recent chapter of our national organization, proudly serving more than 7,000 students in Massachusetts, New York City and now Dayton, Ohio.

For over two decades, Bottom Line has provided consistent, one-on-one support to help students navigate the challenges of accessing and succeeding in college. Through our Access Program, our Advisors work closely with high school students to build lists of best-fit, affordable colleges. Once students enroll at one of our 53 Target Colleges, our College Success Advisors continue supporting them for up to six years, ensuring they persist to graduation and successfully launch their careers.

First, we strongly support the Governor's Merit Scholarship Program. This program has made a difference for thousands of students across Ohio in its first two years. For students in the urban areas of Cleveland, Dayton and Toledo, which we represent, it has:

- Reduced financial barriers that prevent top high school graduates from pursuing higher education;
- Recognized the impressive scholastic achievement of all top graduates; and
- Incentivized Ohio's high-achieving high school students to stay in Ohio.

The response to the Governor's Merit Scholarship has been exceptional. It was expected that 60-65% of students offered the scholarship would accept, but 76% of 2024 high school graduates who were offered the award accepted it (4,578 total acceptances in the first year of the scholarship program), indicating financial need and strength of institutions in Ohio.

The Governor's Merit Scholarship is distributed to the top 5% of all graduates - allowing for an equitable distribution across Ohio. The effects of this have already been demonstrated. While 76% of 2024 high school graduates who were offered GMS accepted the award, that amount varied county by county, with 100% of students in seven, rural, underserved counties (Adams, Hocking, Holmes, Monroe, Noble, Putnam, and Vinton) accepting the award.

The other notable feature of the Governor's Merit scholarship is that students do NOT need to apply for this scholarship. The scholarship leverages data that high schools already have and proactively offers the scholarship to the top student(s). This eliminates barriers that disproportionately affect students from underserved and underrepresented backgrounds.

Likewise, we want to lift up a similar budget proposal that has the potential for significant gains in college access and success for urban and rural students. The governor's proposed budget proposes the creation of a direct admission program in Ohio, whereby participating state institutions of higher education automatically grant admission to high school students based on GPA and standardized test scores. The governor's budget also proposes guaranteed admission, providing students in the top 10% of their graduation class admission to at least one campus of any state institution of higher education, and for students in the top 5% of their graduating class – eligible for the merit scholarship – admission to the main campus. Together, these provisions simplify the admissions process for Ohio families and students, helping maximize opportunity for Ohio students.

These programs are crucial investments to support Ohio's economy, and to invest in people – for their personal growth and for their future successes.

Governor's Merit Scholarship Recipient | Ava Kopasek – Cleveland State University

Chair Stewart, Vice Chairman Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Finance Committee. My name is Ava Kopasek and education has always been a top priority in life. I grew up in the Cleveland area and went to Westpark Community Elementary/Middle School and New Tech West High School. Starting my earlier days of schooling, I struggled with comprehending what I was being taught. Schooling didn't come naturally to me until middle school, when I took the action to teach myself, that's when I became drawn to Math and Science. Going from bad grades in school to being on par with students who had top grades in my classes was a major accomplishment of mine. Eventually, I found my passion for STEM. Currently, I am enrolled in my second semester at Cleveland State University in the Engineering department and I've never been more fulfilled in something that I've pursued.

Nevertheless, I would not be able to pursue my career at Cleveland State University if it weren't for my scholarships like the Governor's Merit Scholarship. The tuition for each semester at Cleveland State University is around \$6,000 which is cheaper compared to most colleges in my area. Despite being more cost-effective compared to most colleges, my family and I would not have sufficient funds to support me in going to college anywhere else. This was a big deal not only to me but to my family who has been a big support in my college journey. Especially because I've always had a passion for learning. I believe money shouldn't be the reason why someone cannot go to college to pursue their dreams.

I am grateful to not have any parental pressures in choosing what I want to pursue, considering I am a first-generation college student. My family has helped my competitive spirit drive me forward. Having older siblings who have pursued higher education has pushed me in the right direction. Going to college for the first time made me very nervous, despite being fearful— I'm glad to have my siblings join this journey with me. This opportunity has led me to being able to take classes such as engineering design, mathematics, coding, etc, which led me to the path that I am on right now.

The Governor's Merit Scholarship has provided me the opportunity to go to the college I want with little to worry about college tuition. Being able to cut down on the financial burden of college expenses and strictly focus on my studies is essential for making sure you are always doing the best in class. This scholarship has given me a new opportunity to do the best that I can in this wildly new experience, and I hope others can also reap the benefits of the Governor's Merit Scholarship.

Members of the committee, thank you for your time and attention to developing Ohio's talent and workforce through post-secondary education. We are happy to answer any questions you may have, and please feel free to reach out if you have any questions as you review the proposed Higher Education budget.