

Testimony of Michael R. Fisher Jr., Ph.D.  
Before the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee  
Rep. Tom Young, Chair  
March 11, 2025

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and Members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

My name is Michael R. Fisher Jr., and I am a professor in the Department of African American and African Studies at The Ohio State University. I am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to House Bill 6 and don't represent the views of Ohio State or my department.

In my submitted testimony to the Senate Higher Education Committee last month (February 2025), I argued that SB-1 would undermine the integrity and quality of higher education in Ohio. For this testimony, I focus on the potentially detrimental economic impact that HB-6 will have on Ohio's economy if the bill becomes law.

Despite the more than 1000 opponent testimonies that called attention to the dangers of SB-1 for Ohioans, the Senate Higher Education Committee passed the bill anyway. But perhaps those Senators—who are supposed to represent the interests of their constituents—were unaware at the time of their vote that public universities in Ohio “create a positive net impact on the state economy and generate a positive return on investment for students, taxpayers, and society.”<sup>1</sup> According to a 2023 study that assessed the economic impact of the Inter-University Council of Ohio's 14 public universities on the state economy by Lightcast, a leading provider of economic impact studies and labor market data to educational institutions, public universities *added* nearly **\$70 billion** in income to the Ohio economy during the 2021–22 fiscal year.<sup>2</sup> That's nearly nine percent of the total gross state product (GSP) of Ohio. The economic impact of nearly \$70 billion is equivalent to supporting roughly 867,000 jobs. In other words, one out of every eight jobs in Ohio is supported by the activities of Ohio's public universities. For perspective, that's greater than the entire Healthcare and Social Assistance industry in the Buckeye State.

**HB-6 will stifle economic vitality in Ohio if the bill becomes law.**

In what follows, I highlight the threat that HB-6 poses to the spending impact of students and alumni and to the public investment benefits of quality higher education for students and taxpayers.

Approximately 23 percent of students who attend public universities in Ohio come from outside of the state. Many of them relocate here. Both relocated out-of-state students and retained in-state

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<sup>1</sup> “Analysis of the Economic Impact and Return on Investment of Education: The Public Universities of Ohio” (Moscow, Idaho: Lightcast, April 2023), [https://iuc-ohio.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/IUC-Economic-Impact-Study-MainReport\\_2122\\_Final.pdf](https://iuc-ohio.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/IUC-Economic-Impact-Study-MainReport_2122_Final.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> “Analysis of the Economic Impact and Return on Investment of Education: The Public Universities of Ohio.”

students—those who would have left the state to pursue a degree elsewhere had they not been accepted to a public university in Ohio—contribute to the student spending impact of public universities. The spending of relocated and retained students during the analysis year added roughly **\$795 million** in income to the Ohio economy, roughly **\$549 million** of which was generated from relocated out-of-state students.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the spending generated by relocated out-of-state students alone is equivalent to supporting roughly 10,000 jobs in Ohio.

**HB-6 threatens to drastically reduce the spending impact of public university students.** If only a fraction of relocated out-of-state students decided not to pursue a degree in one of Ohio’s public universities, that could equate to tens of millions of dollars lost annually. We are already seeing signs at Ohio State that the prospect of this bill becoming law is impacting student recruitment. Admitted applicants to graduate programs who have spoken to faculty have expressed concerns about the quality of their education at Ohio State regarding the proposed prohibition of undefined “controversial beliefs” and a sense of belonging amidst palpable hostility to the recognition of any form of difference.

Students who graduate from an Ohio public university and remain in the state also have a significant spending impact. The *total number* of Ohio public university alumni who remained in the state as members of the workforce amounted to roughly **\$53 billion** in added income for the Ohio economy during the 2021–22 fiscal year.<sup>4</sup> This is equivalent to supporting roughly 648,000 jobs. The added human capital—knowledge, skills, entrepreneurship, and the like—by public universities in Ohio is their greatest economic impact.

**HB-6 threatens to drastically reduce the spending impact of public university alumni.** The potentially substantial reduction in recruitment of relocated out-of-state and retained in-state students who would otherwise have attended and graduated from Ohio’s public universities but instead chose to go elsewhere—like the University of Michigan—may reduce the *accumulated* spending impact of alumni in Ohio potentially by tens to hundreds of millions of dollars.

Beyond the advantageous spending impact of higher education in Ohio, providing a rigorous, quality education to college students—that’s not stymied by political agendas and ideological wars—generates a positive return on investment for students and taxpayers. Students achieve a lifetime of higher wages and improved quality of life outcomes in return for the money and time invested in pursuing a degree at a public university in Ohio. The estimated rate of return on investment for students during the analysis year was roughly 16 percent.<sup>5</sup> Increased wages of students who graduate from Ohio’s public universities and remain in the state add to the creation of higher tax revenue for state and local government and increases government savings. The added tax revenue of alumni of Ohio’s public universities totaled **more than \$8 billion**. Moreover, education is statistically associated with increased

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<sup>3</sup> “Analysis of the Economic Impact and Return on Investment of Education: The Public Universities of Ohio.”

<sup>4</sup> “Analysis of the Economic Impact and Return on Investment of Education: The Public Universities of Ohio.”

<sup>5</sup> “Analysis of the Economic Impact and Return on Investment of Education: The Public Universities of Ohio.”

quality of life outcomes that result in significant government savings. That number totaled **nearly \$2 billion** during the analysis year for a grand total of **\$10 billion** in taxpayer savings benefits.<sup>6</sup>

**HB-6 threatens to diminish the public benefits of a rigorous, quality education for taxpayers.**

Students who leave the state to attend college elsewhere—who otherwise would have remained in Ohio to attend college if not for concerns about government surveillance and interference in curricula and instruction at Ohio’s public universities—and remain out of state will result in the loss of tax revenue for state and local governments.

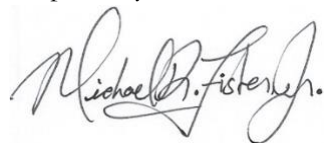
Higher education as it currently stands in the Buckeye State is profitable. It’s good for business and industry. It benefits students, alumni, taxpayers, and the economy. Does the 136<sup>th</sup> General Assembly care about this? Evidence suggests not, but perhaps Senate Republicans were unaware of the detrimental impact of SB-1 on the Ohio economy when they voted to pass the bill last month.

Given the passing of SB-1 and the likelihood of its nearly identical twin, HB-6, doing the same, it’s clear that economic vitality in Ohio is under siege. In fact, I suggest that both bills are anti-capitalist in their orientation. This is tragically ironic given the requirement that students take a course that includes the “study of the American economic system and capitalism.” Despite my many disagreements with conservatives on a range of social, political, and economic issues, I never imagined that the Ohio General Assembly would draft an anti-capitalist bill under the leadership of Republicans. Ronald Reagan would turn in his grave if he learned Republicans were passing bills that violated long-time principles and commitments of the GOP.

Does the 136<sup>th</sup> Ohio General Assembly care about the potentially troubling economic consequences of its anti-capitalist agenda? Evidence suggests not. In which case, I recommend that this bill’s title be changed from “The Advance Ohio Higher Education Act” to “The Anti-Capitalism in the Ohio General Assembly” (or ACOGA) Act of 2025.

This bill will undermine the integrity and diminish the quality of higher education in the Buckeye State and doesn’t benefit the economic interest and welfare of Ohioans. For this reason, I ask that the members of this committee consider my testimony and vote “No” on HB-6. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael R. Fisher Jr." with a stylized, cursive script.

Michael R. Fisher Jr., Ph.D.

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<sup>6</sup> “Analysis of the Economic Impact and Return on Investment of Education: The Public Universities of Ohio.”