



Written Only Testimony of Laura Lanese
Proponent of House Bill 95
Ohio House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
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Chairman Young, Vice Chairman Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony as a proponent of House Bill 95. My name is Laura Lanese, and I serve as President and CEO of the Inter-University Council of Ohio (IUC). Established in 1939, the IUC represents Ohio's 14 public universities, which together educate hundreds of thousands of students and drive innovation across the state.

The IUC is proud to support this legislation which honors the service of Ohio's veterans by strengthening our institutions' ability to support them in their educational and career pursuits. We were encouraged to see this language included in the House passed version of the state operating budget.

Ohio has a long and proud tradition of supporting veterans and military families, and House Bill 95 builds meaningfully on that legacy. If passed, House Bill 95 would implement a strategic, statewide approach to supporting military-connected students as they transition from military service to higher education and ultimately into the workforce. These students bring exceptional leadership, maturity, and discipline to our campus communities, but they often face numerous barriers when navigating academic life. Some of the largest barriers faced by our veterans include identifying and accessing benefits or support services that are already available to them. By investing in infrastructure that helps these students succeed, Ohio not only better honors the service of our veterans but strengthens our state's workforce talent pipeline.

More than 20,000 veteran students using VA benefits are currently enrolled in Ohio's public universities. Many of these students will go on to become leaders in defense, intelligence, and cybersecurity, while others will become teachers in our schools or help close workforce gaps in high-demand fields like engineering. House Bill 95 proposes an investment of approximately \$2.3 million over the next biennium to enhance support services at the 51 institutions of higher education participating in the Ohio Veterans Education Council (OVEC), an organization dedicated to assisting veterans in accessing educational opportunities in the state of Ohio. OVEC provides resources and support to veterans and their families to help them navigate the various educational benefits and programs available to them, including the GI Bill and other state-specific initiatives.

The potential return on investment from this legislation is clear: increased retention, improved graduation rates, and stronger career outcomes for those who have served our nation. Specifically, House Bill 95 would:

- Fund Military Community Advocate scholarships for veterans to serve as peer mentors and campus leaders. This will build more military-inclusive environments on campus and strengthen retention.
- Provide grants to help veterans' services offices grow philanthropic support for long-term sustainability.
- Enable participation in an Advancement Institute. This institute, led by the Ohio-based National Veterans Leadership Foundation connects development officers, marketing, career services, and veterans' offices across institutions to align strategies and improve veteran hiring outcomes.
- Fund various initiatives including support the development of a website to expand public awareness of programs and offerings, administer membership and Purple Star status, and facilitate information sharing.

Furthermore, House Bill 95 builds upon ongoing successful state-level initiatives like the Purple Star designation, the Military Strategic Implementation Team at the Ohio Department of Higher Education, and OVEC—all of which have laid the groundwork for institutional collaboration and innovation. House Bill 95 ensures Ohio's higher education institutions are equipped to meet the needs of those who have served. This innovative and coordinated approach could serve as a model for other states seeking to improve veteran outcomes in higher education and position Ohio as a national leader in this area.

This bill also advances Ohio's broader economic development strategy. Graduates who are veterans are well-positioned to meet the growing demand in key economic sectors such as advanced manufacturing, logistics, aerospace, information technology, and defense. Through this proposed investment Ohio can support thousands of service members and their families in completing degrees, securing meaningful employment, and contributing to the strength of our state. Simply put, the success of our veterans and our military-connected students will greatly contribute to Ohio's overall workforce.

For these reasons, the IUC respectfully urges the committee to advance House Bill 95. We also support its continued inclusion in the final version of the state operating budget. The IUC stands ready to work with the bill's sponsors and members of this committee to ensure Ohio's institutions of higher education remain national leaders in supporting those who have served our country.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at your convenience.