



Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors

222 East Town Street, 2W, Columbus, OH 43215

Testimony of Gretchen McNamara, D.M.A.

Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors

Before the Senate Finance Committee

Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair

May 29, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the 7,000 faculty represented by the Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors (OCAAUP), I submit interested party testimony regarding Substitute House Bill 96, the state operating budget.

OCAAUP respectfully requests this committee to consider the following amendments to the bill:

- 1) Increase State Share of Instruction (SSI) to 3.5% each fiscal year.
- 2) Hold Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG) funding steady from FY 2026 to FY 2027.
- 3) Reinstate Gov. DeWine's proposed funding for the Mental Health Support line item (\$10 million each fiscal year).
- 4) Remove the policy language in this bill that seeks to eradicate meaningful shared governance at our state institutions of higher education (*Lines 63858-63892*).
- 5) Eliminate special earmarks for collegiate athletics' programs.
- 6) Adopt the "Hunger-Free Campus Act."

For greater context, I encourage you to read our more in-depth testimony to the Senate Higher Education Committee, which I have attached as an addendum. Please contact me if you have questions, or if I can provide additional information. Thank you for your time and consideration.



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Testimony of Gretchen McNamara, D.M.A.
Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
May 15, 2025

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Timken, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the 7,000 faculty represented by the Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors (OCAAUP), I would like to share our thoughts regarding House Bill 96, the state operating budget.

It is important to recognize why we have public colleges and universities in the first place and why they are worthy of investment.

A college education used to be only for the privileged few. Public institutions were created to give any citizen the opportunity to pursue a post-secondary education and enter careers that otherwise were out of reach. We still have some faculty within our ranks who recall attending an Ohio institution tuition-free or being able to work a minimum wage job to pay their tuition and fees in full each year. While public institutions are still less expensive compared to their private counterparts, students are still accumulating substantial debt to fund their educations.

We want to ensure our students have an affordable education. But the reality is that most student tuition and fees are being used to pay for things outside of instruction. The growth in tuition costs can be attributed to two major factors: inadequate state funding support and increased spending in non-instructional areas, especially administrative positions and administrative support staff and athletics. On average, Ohio universities are spending less than 24% of their budgets employing faculty, and that percentage includes all faculty, from part-time instructors to full-time tenured professors, and it includes salaries and benefits.¹

In terms of Ohio's current higher education funding model, we'd like to make a few points. First, we currently have a State Share of Instruction (SSI) model that is primarily outcome-based and fails to account for what goes into the front end. By that, we mean that there is no incentive for institutions to invest in the people who teach the students and generate groundbreaking research. As a result, we continue to see the gradual erosion of quality education by drastic reductions in faculty positions and a proclivity to pay adjuncts poverty wages rather than fund

¹ Data obtained from <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds>.

full-time faculty positions. Ohio's public colleges and universities should be rewarded for investing in the core workers of the institutions—those who deliver the instruction.

SSI is the most equitable stream of resources to our institutions. It helps students regardless of their background, high school GPA, or socio-economic status. We consistently hear how demographic realities have led to decreased enrollments, but we know that people having fewer children is only a part of the problem. As mentioned previously, colleges and universities bear some responsibility for increased costs by over-spending in non-instructional areas; however, the lack of adequate state support has directly contributed to higher tuition rates, and today's students are understandably wary about taking on debt.

Education is often referred to as The Great Equalizer, but it simply can't be any sort of equalizer when there is such unequal opportunity to achieve it. While the House of Representatives' "increases" of approximately 2% each year of the biennium to SSI are a welcome change from the Governor's proposal, colleges and universities cannot possibly continue to operate on "increases" that fail to keep pace with inflation.

If we fund it, they will come. There are states that are investing in higher education and seeing increased enrollments as a result. For instance, in Massachusetts, the "MassReconnect" program provides free community college to people with no prior degree who are 25 years or older, and it has increased enrollment among that demographic by 45% in just one year.² Moreover, this initiative increased enrollment by 8% overall across the community college sector in the state. Those results then led to the creation of the MassEducate program this year to make community college free for anyone without a degree, regardless of age.

We were pleased to see that the House of Representatives' maintained the Governor's proposed increases of 11.8% in Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG) funding in the first year, although we are puzzled by the decrease in year two. OCOG provides low-income Ohioans with flexibility to access their education at a range of institutions.

On the issue of a special earmark of \$1.6 million to fund Cleveland State's wrestling programs, we must point out what a terrible precedent this will set. Faculty are supportive of our student-athletes; and if athletic programs get cut, we believe that any scholarship support should stay with those student-athletes for as long as they choose to remain at the institution. It is unfortunate that the men's wrestling team was eliminated (along with women's softball and golf), but when budgets need to be trimmed, the pain has to be shared. If there are more resources available for our public institutions, the money could be better spent in other ways.

We are also deeply concerned with the elimination of mental health funding support for students. On some of our campuses, there is a wait list to access a counselor. Students who get

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<https://www.mass.gov/news/departments-of-higher-education-data-shows-massreconnect-program-drove-45-enrollment-increase-in-new-students-aged-25-and-older>

the mental health care they need are less likely to turn to substance abuse and more likely to excel academically. Ohio should be enhancing this funding, not eliminating it completely.

Finally, we must address the policy language in this bill that seeks to eradicate meaningful shared governance at our state institutions of higher education (*Lines 63858-63892*). This legislature has stated that they are trying to empower boards of trustees; yet this language does the opposite by explicitly prohibiting boards from delegating authority regarding curricular and programmatic matters. From a practical standpoint, it does not make any sense to attempt to sideline faculty—the experts—in these processes. Boards of trustees already have the final say in all matters of an institution, but there must be meaningful shared governance to ensure that institutions are adhering to academic standards and that students are best served.

Our institutions of higher education are great resources. Not only do they educate Ohio students and prepare them for careers, but they also attract students from other states and countries, and are economic drivers in their communities and beyond. Investments in higher education always generate significant returns. This is a particularly important point given the fact that Ohio has perpetually suffered from a “brain drain” problem and is now confronting a significant population decline.³ Higher education must be part of the solutions.

Thank you for your time and consideration.