



May 30, 2025

The Honorable Jerry Cirino  
Chair, Ohio Senate Finance Committee  
1 Capitol Square  
First Floor, 127  
Columbus, OH 43215

**RE: Written Proponent Testimony on HB 96 – Commercial Truck Driver Student Aid Program**

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written proponent testimony for HB 96, the state operating budget. Specifically, I'd like to draw your attention to the *Commercial Truck Driver Student Aid Program*, housed in the Ohio Department of Higher Education's budget. The 133<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly created the Program and established a \$5 million fund specific to CDL education that offers students a 50% grant and 50% loan to complete CDL School, with the loan being forgiven if the student works in Ohio for at least 12 months after graduation.

The Program has been very successful, with all waves of funding been claimed within a few weeks of it becoming available. This funding provides a direct path for recipients to enter a career in the trucking industry and gives opportunities to individuals who otherwise might not have had them. From the trucking industry's perspective, this Program addresses significant workforce challenges that plague our industry at a time when they have never been greater.

The Ohio Department of Higher Education provides funding to eligible institutions (as approved by the Department of Public Safety). The funds are currently available to 39 participating schools – with a mix of public institutions, private institutions, and Ohio Technical Centers. The various institutions then select students who will receive the funding.

The Program issued its first round of awards in 2022, providing funding to 30 CDL schools throughout Ohio. Another round of awards was issued in 2024 as per the state biennium budget (HB 33), passed in June 2023, with a slight increase to \$5.1 million over from 2023-2024. In 2024 alone, 493 students were awarded funding according to ODHE. In the first three months of 2025, programs were awarded \$520,265 to assist 101 students in the program. 379 students that received funding from the first two years of the program have received full or partial loan forgiveness – which means the Program is working exactly as intended. This program funds Ohio's students, creates Ohio jobs, and helps Ohio businesses.

The “As Passed by the House” version of HB 96 recognizes the demand and success of the Program and increased the appropriation to \$6 million over the biennium. We respectfully ask the Ohio Senate to maintain this funding throughout the Senate process for HB 96 to address the truck driver shortage in Ohio through this innovative way to support the training for in-demand jobs in the Buckeye state.

We understand and respect the deliberative process the legislature goes through to ensure that the state’s resources are spent in a judicious manner. As already demonstrated, there is a clear need for the continuation and expansion of funding to this crucial scholarship. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit written testimony. If there are questions from members of the committee, please feel free to contact me at [tom@ohiotrucking.org](mailto:tom@ohiotrucking.org).

Sincerely,

Tom Balzer  
President and CEO  
Ohio Trucking Association