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University of Findlay
Katherine R. Fell, President

Ohio Senate Higher Education Committee
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Chairwoman Roegner, Vice Chair Timken, Ranking Member Ingram, Senator Cirino, Senator Koehler, Senator Reineke, and Senator Weinstein, on behalf of University of Findlay, I am President Kathy Fell. Thank you for the time today to present evidence on the high-impact, high-value education provided to learners by Ohio's independent colleges and universities and to provide perspective on disadvantages to the inclusion of private colleges and universities in Senate Bill 1.

As I begin, please know I am grateful for your tireless efforts toward building and sustaining a strong, vibrant, competitive workforce for our great state through affordable and innovative educational opportunities that prepare learners to respond to local economic needs. University of Findlay is proud to contribute to these goals.

Workforce

In terms of workforce contributions, University of Findlay's strongest programs include animal science/pre-veterinary medicine, physical therapy, and pharmacy—all among the fastest-growing occupations in the U.S. (Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2024). Of those 2024 undergraduate students who responded to a university employment survey, 77% reported attaining employment in Ohio immediately following graduation. In order to successfully enrich, retain, and up-skill today's learners for workforce demands, University of Findlay developed a preparatory gap initiative in 2021, which brought together instructors of first-year courses, advisors, and student support staff to share successful teaching and tutoring strategies. These efforts resulted in

- increased retention rates among first-year students: UF is currently at a 90% retention rate for Fall 2024 to Spring 2025.
- lower rates of withdrawal and failure in foundational courses such as chemistry (13% improvement), college composition (12% improvement), and math (15% improvement).

Affordability

The funding that the state provides to college-seeking students, such as the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG), Choose Ohio First (COF) aid, and the Governor's Merit Scholarship program, is crucial to supporting student learning and educational choice at Ohio's private institutions. At the University of Findlay, this funding provides students with the opportunity to pursue their dreams of becoming a veterinarian, a nurse, an entrepreneur, and so much more in a faith-based, welcoming environment that speaks to their needs. This year (fiscal year 2025)

- total state aid to students attending the University of Findlay was \$2.67 million.
- Additional aid provided by the University of Findlay to students beyond that amount has been \$54,920,010.

Independent universities are critical to the success of higher education in Ohio. We are grateful for and good stewards of the monies the state provides for our students and work diligently to supply additional scholarship dollars for those same students so they might achieve their goals without accumulating high rates of debt. To that point, according to the most recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), UF's default rate stands at 1.2%, well below the national average of 8.15%.

Innovation

The heartbeat of their communities, Ohio independent universities are uniquely designed to listen to their learners and respond to their locales. Recognizing that the non-traditional student body is now larger than the traditional one, University of Findlay has built flexible options such as weekend physical and occupational therapy programs as well as online doctor of pharmacy and doctor of education programs and hybrid options for part-time students, working adults, and those seeking education due to a life or career transition. UF also offers a variety of certificates, among them data analytics, information assurance, and diagnostic medical sonography, along with associate of arts degrees. Soon, associate of science degrees and stackable credits will also be options. In addition, we

- launched one of the nation's first online doctor of pharmacy programs in Fall 2023;
- partner with 48 high schools across the state to provide College Credit Plus courses and academic pathways to over 2,000 students;
- collaborate with business entities such as Marathon, Cintas, Chik-Fil-A, Garner Trucking, First National Bank, Cleveland Clinic, Blanchard Valley Health System, and GSW, among others—to provide learners with best-in-class experiences, clinical rotations, and internships.

As a founding member of the Center to Advance Manufacturing, the University of Findlay in partnership with Bowling Green State University and Owens Community College trains students and current employees in advanced manufacturing for our region.

The most pressing problems students face in their lives and careers are complex, ethically nuanced, and comprised of many interdependent factors. UF's commitment to developing students as whole persons—knowledgeable, creative, and ethical leaders—directly outlines our commitment to providing an education that positions learners to thrive in their chosen occupations and give back to their communities and the state of Ohio in meaningful ways.

Senate Bill 1

The extension of Senate Bill 1 to private colleges and universities who want to participate in the Governor's Merit Scholarship creates barriers to the effective, efficient, and sustainable systems currently in place. Specifically, I would like to speak to

Faculty workload standards, evidence of undergraduate teaching, state-mandated evaluations, peer review systems, and post-tenure review (Sections 3345.45, 3345.451, and 3345.453)

Small, private institutions, such as University of Findlay, are not research institutions. We pride ourselves on knowing our students by name; we are personally invested in their futures, and stay in touch with many after graduation, building relationships over a lifetime. Teaching and advising are the most important aspects of our work. This is evidenced in the commitment UF has made to in-house professional development for faculty and staff. For example, our Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) facilitates

- an interdisciplinary, peer mentoring program;
- instructor coaching; and
- an annual "Excel at Teaching" conference.

Faculty responsibilities, evidence of teaching, evaluation processes, peer review, and workload at private institutions are developed based on the specific needs of learners and often are crafted in response to local workforce demands. To require standardization of these processes with those of public institutions would negate the role of University of Findlay in creating a community of learning unique to Findlay, Ohio. I would also like to address the SB1 topics of

Religious exemption, Board of Trustees requirements and positions of neutrality (Sections 3345.0216, 3345.0217)

The University of Findlay was founded by the Churches of God, General Conference, is grounded in Christianity, and welcomes all. While faith is inherently controversial, we require and practice civil discourse on our campus. Students choose to attend UF because of this fact. We believe an institution can embrace faith *and* foster productive debate through presentation of opposing viewpoints.

Our Board of Trustees members support these efforts. To require them to maintain positions of neutrality will discourage participation among those who have or are considering taking on this important service. Also, in regard to the

Top 10% requirement and syllabus posting mandates (Section 3345.029)

While some private institutions may have the capacity to welcome the top 10% of high school graduates, others may not. For University of Findlay, the ability to properly welcome and nurture an additional influx of students would depend upon seat availability in the students' chosen programs of study as well as housing and financial aid needs. I know we all agree that students will not benefit from this opportunity if appropriate supports and resources for success are not available.

Likewise, UF gives great attention to syllabi construction, dissemination, and archiving for internal and external (accreditation) purposes. To require that all syllabi be searchable and publicly accessible would put undue burden on UF's technological infrastructure, resulting in additional operating costs that would likely be passed on to students in the form of increased tuition or reduced services.

Sponsor Cirino understood the difference between the state's independent colleges and its public institutions in both Senate Bill 83 and Senate Bill 1. As I close, I respectfully request that Ohio private institutions not be included in Senate Bill 1. Ohio's private institutions are highly effective at delivering quality education, strong student outcomes, and career-ready graduates. They offer students and families meaningful educational choices, customized experiences, and mission-aligned programs.

Ohio is working hard to expand educational choice in the K-12 space and it would be a shame for those same students who are seniors in high school to be excluded from educational choice in college just one year later. SB 1's mandates would impose significant compliance costs without improving outcomes and likely lead to higher tuition, reduced financial aid flexibility, and diminished innovation.

Thank you for your time, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.