

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Timken, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Josie Mayle. I am a biology major at Cleveland State University, and I love what I do. I love science, animals, and being in a lab. It is my hope to one day work in conservation biology in an effort to protect endangered species that have been impacted by climate change. However, my academic journey has been difficult, and the road ahead appears to be long and uncertain, because I was not afforded the privilege of an educated family background with the wealth to go to school debt-free.

My family comes from West Virginia, deep in the Appalachian mountains, and — as I'm sure the committee can understand as a majority represents a party that boasts support for rural, working class Americans — this has brought some intergenerational struggle that we still work every day to weed ourselves out of. My father joined the army to escape his living conditions, now working 60 hour work weeks as a supervisor at a manufacturing plant. My mother, although brilliant in accounting, never saw a future for herself in college, and is now a bartender, which I will say, she loves. My brother never finished high school, and my closest proximity to college growing up was at my aunt's graduation party. I'm not telling you this to foster pity for my family, but I am telling you this because, although my family would not give up anything they have now, they have always told me one thing: "Go to college so that you don't end up like us."

Going to school as a first generation student was an overwhelming and isolating experience. I had no idea how anything worked, where the scholarships were, or who to go to for help if I needed it. I just put my head down and got right to my studies. Shortly into my time as a student, I had to drop my enrollment down to part time because I could not afford a full-time tuition with my financial aid calculation at the time. My mother was originally divorced but had married a pipefitter and, consequently, my EFC skyrocketed, even though I was not receiving any financial contributions from my family. I was able to sort this out and am now back at school full-time, but with the current threats facing higher education funding, I am worried that that will not last.

Throughout all of this, I work full time to support myself through school, which puts a stifling strain on how much I am able to invest into my education. I don't think it should be this way. I don't think that someone like myself, who is extremely motivated to do well in school, who has the drive to build the foundation for a great future, who would really excel if given the chance, should be held back by something as trivial as money. If you want to fight for the working class and rural Ohioans, you would want them to have access to a quality education, attainable without needing to work lengthy hours while trying to balance studies and without needing to take out thousands of dollars in loans.

A proper investment in our universities would be good for all of us. We are currently in a shortage of many college-level professions, from teachers to nurses to social workers, and this is in part due to the resources that many are currently lacking when it comes to acquiring a postsecondary education. The Ohio College Opportunity Grant is severely underfunded for

being this state's only need-based source of financial aid for all Ohioans. The State Share of Instruction continues to be increased by increments not appropriately adjusted for inflation. I urge you to support a People's Budget, which includes a 3% increase to SSI, a \$200 million per year increase for OCOG, and a restructuring of OCOG completely. I urge that this grant be restructured to assist with more than just general tuition and fees, but for other cost of living expenses as well, and to assist the thousands of community college and regional campus students who miss out on this grant due to its current aid formula. This is the only way to keep Ohio students in-state, and would be an investment in our future economy.

When we are talking about the Ohio of tomorrow, one that includes a way forward for many of your constituents, we must talk about our colleges. I think I can safely say that, with my drive, I belong in school, and I know there are many Ohioans like me who feel the same but have never even started their path to a degree. I don't think you would tell me or any other Ohioans that we don't deserve to thrive. Once again, I urge your support for a People's Budget, and I thank you for the opportunity to testify.