SB 345 Proponent Testimony

Thank you, Chair Timken, Vice Chair Roegner, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Ohio Senate Higher Education Committee. My name is Abigail Benjamin and I am testifying on behalf of Arnold Ventures. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide testimony in favor of Senate Bill 345.

For many, a college education provides marketable skills and opens opportunities to well-paying careers. Yet too few Ohioans graduate: Less than a third of students who start at an Ohio community college will earn a degree within three years. Less than 70% of students who begin at an Ohio [1] Students who do not graduate often find themselves with debt but little to show for it, even as Ohio businesses compete for college-educated workers.

Often, the right supports at the right time can help students make it to graduation. These supports – like career coaching to connect students with employment opportunities and assistance paying for books and gas money to get to campus – can help ensure that students get positive returns from college and the state benefits from more students with credentials that matter to employers.

Thanks to years of rigorous evaluation, there are some programs that we know work. They just need to be scaled. Other programs are promising based on early results. They need to be assessed.

Colleges around the country, from New York to North Carolina, to Lorain County Community College here in Ohio, have adopted evidence-based practices that help more students graduate. Local economies, communities, and most of all students benefit from these reforms. Yet these programs can come with significant start-up costs. These upfront costs keep campuses from adopting best practices and from innovating.

SB 345 creates a competitive grant to help colleges adopt and implement evidence-based reforms. These grants will help campuses scale best practices and experiment with promising practices. Evidence-based reforms can boost graduation rates, make college more affordable for students, and improve the efficiency of Ohio's higher education system.

Moreover, SB 345 gives priority to reforms that have the strongest evidence behind them. These are reforms that have been rigorously evaluated, whose cost effectiveness can be measured, and that produce significant improvements for students. This creates a strong incentive for Ohio colleges to stay on the cutting edge of education reforms.

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[1] Graduation & Retention Rates | The Ohio Department of Higher Education

Through the competitive grant program established in SB 345, Ohio colleges can test, implement, and scale evidence-based reforms that help more Ohioans complete college and contribute to the state's economy.

Thank you for your time and consideration.