

Ohio House of Representatives - House Finance Committee
HB 64
Testimony of Kent Trofholz
Executive Director, Ohio Association of Career Colleges and Schools
April 17, 2015

Good afternoon, Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking member Driehaus and members of the House Finance Committee. My name is Kent Trofholz and effective in January of this year, I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Association of Career Colleges and Schools (OACCS). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today regarding the specific items contained in HB 64 that affect the students that attend Ohio's career colleges and schools.

During my testimony before the Higher Education Sub-committee in February and March, I explained that Ohio's career colleges and schools play a critical role in transforming Ohio into a stable, growing and attractive place to live, work and raise a family. Our colleges and schools exist solely to prepare Ohioans for today's in-demand occupations; provide retraining for displaced workers; and help Ohio workers upgrade their skills to continue moving up the career ladder.

Our colleges and schools are privately owned and self-supporting, and we receive no direct taxpayer support. Our advocacy is on behalf of our students, in an effort to further support their educational and life's goals.

I am here today to ask for an increase in the OCOG appropriation for students attending our career colleges. The sub-bill provision added \$5 million to the OCOG line item per year; however, none of the additional dollars would go to career college students. Only public colleges and private, independent universities would benefit from this increase, despite the fact that career colleges and schools are an essential pillar alongside public and non-profit universities that together support the state's higher education goals.

Favoring other sectors over career colleges and schools further widens the financial aid disparity between Ohio students – not based on the students' financial need – but solely on which school they choose to attend. We urge you to apply these additional dollars for career college students proportional to the \$5 million given to students attending public and non-profit schools; or a proportional share of the additional \$5 million added in the sub-bill.

Also in the sub-bill, the proposed Student Debt Reduction Program was expanded to include students who attend non-profit institutions with a Certificate of Authorization from the Board of Regents. In contrast however, students attending career colleges with the same Certificate of Authorization from the Board of Regents are *excluded* from the program's eligibility. Ohio needs to grant tuition assistance, including OCOG, to students based on financial need, without regard to where they enroll. If an Ohioan wants to go to college to earn a nursing degree, it is of no public policy interest where the student earns that degree. Governmental policies should apply equitably across all institutions of higher education. The 34,000 Ohioans earning Associates or Bachelor's degrees at career colleges to improve their opportunities in life should not be penalized for choosing a career college over a taxpayer-supported college or non-profit university. Quite simply, a student in need is a student in need.

For example, students pursuing an Associate degree in accounting should receive the same support from the state of Ohio whether they attend DeVry University or Columbus State Community College four miles away. Instead, the DeVry student will receive less OCOG money and would be ineligible for the Student Debt Reduction Program, simply because they prefer the education they receive at DeVry.

Our request for additional financial aid for career college students is a matter of fair treatment. But it's more than that. Increasing OCOG for students who are focused on increasing their on-the-job skills is a great investment for Ohio and helps employers fill positions that otherwise go begging for lack of qualified workers. To realize that return of investment, though, our students need OCOG tuition assistance. OCOG is vital to our students, especially lower-income adults, minorities and women, to earn degrees, seek retraining, and increase their earning potential. Many of our students are pursuing an education and an opportunity for a better life against great odds. Women attending our career colleges account for nearly 70 percent of our enrollment. Minorities make up more than 32 percent of our enrollment, the highest percentage of all sectors of higher education. And 66 percent of our students are age 25 and older.

When you invest in career college students, you are fueling Ohio's economy. That's because 72 percent of our graduates earned degrees in health, technology, and business – Ohio's fastest growing occupations, according to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. Although career colleges comprised only 8.6 percent of all college graduates in 2012-2013, they represented 29 percent of all graduates earning a computer/technology degree. Let me emphasize that point: nearly one-third of *all* graduates going into IT get their training at career

colleges. Our graduates represented nearly 18 percent of all graduates earning a health-related degree. Consider that the U.S. will face a shortfall of 193,000 nursing professionals by 2020, according to a Georgetown University study, and I think you would agree that OCOG is a smart incentive to encourage Ohioans to pursue these important career paths.

As you know, under current law, a career college must have a Certificate of Authorization from the Board of Regents for their students to be eligible for OCOG, and this requirement does not change in Sub. HB 64.

We believe that Ohio needs to offer many paths to career success. Competition among four-year institutions, community colleges and career colleges is the best way to promote choice and accountability. If it's good public policy to support aid for needy students attending public colleges and non-profit universities, its good public policy to equitably fund all needy career college students.

Thank you for the opportunity to state our position. On behalf of the members of the Ohio Association of Career Colleges and Schools, and the 72,000 Ohioans on our campuses, I respectfully request you to increase OCOG for career college students as an investment in Ohio's economic future.