

Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education

Governor Mike DeWine Executive Budget

Central State University

Dr. Jack Thomas, President

March 3, 2021

Chairman Cross, Ranking Member Howse and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education. I am Jack Thomas, President of Central State University. Joining me today are Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Mark Hatcher, Esq., my Chief of Staff, Charles Shahid, my Vice President for Administration and Finance & CFO, Curtis Pettis, and my Senior Policy Advisor, Chris Widener.

I am no stranger to the state budgeting process. For over a decade, I served as President of Western Illinois University and I had numerous opportunities to testify before similar committees. For 2 consecutive years, our state did not pass a state budget, so I am incredibly appreciative to be before you today in support of the FY 2022 and FY 2023 operating budget. Central State University is Ohio's only public Historically Black University (HBCU) and with your support, we are uniquely positioned for greatness.

Let me start by thanking Governor Mike DeWine, Chancellor Randy Gardner, and members of the General Assembly for your

continued and steadfast support of higher education. You heard testimony yesterday from Bruce Johnson who serves as President of the Inter-University Council (IUC) of Ohio. As President of Central State University, I fully support the efforts of the IUC to advance support for 4-year, public higher education, and I join the other 13 universities in expressing our appreciation. However, even though you will hear different requests from each organization, you can rest assured that we are aligned in our efforts to make Ohio higher education the best in the country. There is an old African Proverb that says, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” Today, we stand together with our colleagues.

Central State University was founded in 1887. In 2012, the Ohio legislature granted Central State its long-awaited 1890 land-grant status. The Ohio House of Representatives approved Senate Concurrent Resolution 30, a resolution designating Central State University as Ohio's 1890 Land Grant Institution. The designation as a land grant institution provides additional resources to Central State for teaching and research capacity in the areas of science, technology, engineering, agriculture, and mathematics (STEAM). Today, Central State University offers 36-degree programs across four colleges. We offer majors in areas such as Agricultural Education, Manufacturing Engineering and Sustainable Agriculture, Accounting and International Business,

Criminal Justice and Political Science, – and Central State University is one of only four institutions and the only HBCU in the country to offer a degree in Water Resources Management!

Central State University serves a population of students who are 80% Pell grant eligible and come from lower, socio-economic backgrounds. 41% of our students identify as first-generation students meaning they are the first in their family to attend college. Even with full Pell grants and federal loans, the average unmet need of students enrolled at Central State is \$3,000 per student per year. Central State University and higher education in general are a proven and sound investment. We do an outstanding job at preparing students for careers and jobs right here in Ohio.

Like many of the students we serve, I too was a first-generation college student. I grew up on a farm in Calhoun, a small community in Lowndes County, Alabama (sits between Selma and Montgomery, Alabama). Thanks to my parents, I am a proud graduate of two (2) HBCUs – Alabama A&M University and Virginia State University and I certainly would not be where I am today without the world-class education that these two HBCUs provided.

Let me provide some global statistics about HBCUs. While HBCUs comprise only 3 percent of all colleges and universities in the United

States, they have graduated about one third of all black graduates with bachelor's degrees and 75 percent of all PhDs, 46 percent of all business executives, 50 percent of all black engineers, 80 percent of all black federal judges, 50 percent of all black doctors, and 50 percent of all black attorneys. HBCUs generate \$14.8 billion in economic impact annually and 134,000 jobs for their local and regional economies. HBCU graduates will earn a total of \$130 billion over their lifetimes. Indeed, all students deserve a quality education and access to the American dream.

Upon arriving at Central State University, I immediately developed and shared nine (9) strategic priorities for the University, and they are as follows:

1. We will enhance and maintain compliance for our 1890 Land Grant mission through academic programing, cooperative extension, grants, research and federal and state funding.

2. We will grow our enrollment by meeting prospective students where they are, exploiting the most modern and culturally effective forms of communication. We will continue by organizing and reinforcing existing administrative processes and exhausting every effort to provide excellent service to our various stakeholders. We will focus on being a student-centered university where every

decision is made with the students' best interest at heart. With the national decrease in enrollment and subsequent negative impact on student financial aid, we must embrace a new approach to recruiting with a focus on diversity. We will find creative and engaging ways to showcase the talents, unique skills and academic excellence of our academy.

3. With a combination of useful and productive technologies, we will greatly improve our retention and graduation rates by taking the time to implement innovative techniques like a robust early alert system to truly understand where our students are falling short before it's too late.

4. We will develop an aggressive marketing and rebranding campaign that comprehensively defines our audience and establishes dominance and brand authority in our market. We will use the campaign to recruit and enroll more Ohio students and connect them to internships and careers upon graduation.

5. We will begin the groundwork for a multimillion-dollar comprehensive fundraising campaign and strengthen our donor relations by opening meaningful and prosperous dialogue around

the impact of their generosity. The comprehensive fundraising campaign will support scholarships, faculty development, academic programs, instructional equipment and facilities.

6. We will develop a bona fide Honors College that will be placed at the forefront of the University. We will recruit some of the best and brightest students that will help to enhance the overall academic profile of the University, focusing recruitment efforts on students with high ACT/SAT and grade point averages.

7. We will transform our academy through increasing degree offerings, carving a niche in academic programs and identifying signature academic offerings. We will establish flexible course offerings including, online, weekend and hybrid courses. Ultimately, it is our goal to propose a school of graduate studies with prospectus for masters and doctoral degrees.

8. Our efforts to enhance retention will include strengthening the culture of our incoming and current students by building a new learning and living environment that includes new residents' halls and renovations of existing ones.

9. We will review the University's campus master plan to determine those facilities that we should forge ahead in seeking funding and establishing a timeline for construction, particularly those that are centered around our 1890 Land Grant mission with a focus on agriculture.

Our goals are ambitious and aggressive, and we will achieve them all.

Central State is the only 4-year, public university in Ohio located in a township and not in a city. This has created excess costs associated with Fire/EMS, water surcharges, and other service costs from nearby municipalities and presents us with a unique set of fiscal challenges. The Coronavirus pandemic has changed the way we do business. Online classes, virtual recruitment and enrollment activities, reduced residential hall capacity, and limited extracurricular activities have become the new normal. Our general population is nearly 2,000 students on campus with the goal of enrolling 3,000 students. We are the most affordable public, 4-year university in the state of Ohio with tuition and fees of \$7,000 per year, and we have restricted tuition increases for many years, as directed by state legislation. The pandemic also forced our Governor and the General Assembly to make incredibly difficult fiscal decisions as it relates to public higher education, and specifically Central State University. The State Share of Instruction (SSI) was reduced by 4.6% (annualized); the Central State Supplement was

reduced by 3.8% and our 1890 land-grant research and extension state matches were reduced by 5% each.

Central State University supports the IUC recommendation of a 1.8% increase in SSI in FY 2022 and FY 2023. Ultimately, the closer we could get to FY 2009 SSI funding levels, as supported by the Chancellor, the better for us all. We are also requesting the following: that line 235-514, Central State Supplement be restored to its FY 2020 as appropriated level and that line 235-546, Central State Agricultural Research & Development and line 235-548, Central State Cooperative Extension Services, both be increased to match the projected federal awards.

Central State's Supplement is a critical part of funding provided by the State. It allows us to maintain our affordable tuition, to maintain a reasonable faculty to student ratio of 14-1, and to deliver quality academic services to students. As we continue to endure this pandemic, reduced Supplement funding will mean less mental health services, less counseling, and less career advisement. We are requesting that line 235-514 be appropriated at \$11,685,516 in FY 2022 and FY 2023. This equates to an increase of \$444,049 in FY 2022 and FY 2023 which restores the Supplement to its FY 2018 and FY 2019 "pre-cut" funding level. The Supplement has remained flat for 5 years with

no adjustments for inflation and cost of living. Our additional ask is that the Supplement be adjusted with a modest 2.5% cost of living increase of \$292,137 each fiscal year.

In previous budgets, the Governor and the General Assembly have been gracious enough to match dollar-for-dollar the federal funds we receive to support our 1890 land-grant research and extension activities. Ohio is one of the few states that receives 100% matching from the state, and we appreciate your recognition of our designation. If Ohio chooses not to match the federal dollars we receive, we risk losing vital dollars used to support the citizens of Ohio. I also remind you that we continue to build its 1890 land-grant infrastructure while other 1890's have had a 100-year head-start. Our request is that line item 235-546, Central State Agricultural Research and Development be increased by \$1,055,000 in FY 2022 and FY 2023, and that line item 235-548 be increased by \$1,340,000 in FY 2022 and \$1,159,242 in FY 2023. Our match request is always difficult to track as the federal government operates on a different fiscal year. Further, the available funding can change with each federal budget and joint funding resolution. As a result, we work very closely with the Office of Budget & Management and the Ohio Department of Higher Education to identify the necessary matching funds. These requests for funding increases will ensure that

our University emerges from the challenges of 2020 ready to not just survive, but to thrive!

I would like to share that in partnership with my University Board of Trustees, I have launched the development of a new University strategic plan. Part of the planning process involved the formation of a Blue Ribbon Taskforce – a group of experienced, external University administrators charged with conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the University’s recruitment and enrollment practices, academic offerings, technology infrastructure, and University finances – and providing me and the Board with strategies for improvement. They left no stone unturned. We are using the Taskforce’s recommendations, rooted in University best practices, to take Central State University to the next level of excellence. We have launched a University-wide mentoring program where every freshman student is mentored by a member of the faculty, staff, or administration. I am mentoring the following four (4) students: Brianna Bingham, Janarro Bradly, Wakwan Braxton-Cross, and Jordan Benjamin. After starting a mentoring program at my previous institution, retention rates increased by 10%. We have developed a bona-fide University Honors College and hired its inaugural Executive Director. To date, we have received over 100 applications from students with high grade point averages and standardized test scores. We have a progressive faculty who are

working to increase our online course and degree offerings so that we can remain flexible and nimble in the everchanging higher education environment. As a result, we will soon offer a Master of Business Administration degree completely online. My leadership team and I toured the Air Force Research Lab and the Air Force Institute of Technology to discuss greater collaboration on joint research projects. We have completely reengineered our enrollment and recruitment practices to meet students where they are and prioritize the enrollment of Ohio students. We have a robust Career and Internship Office that ensures that our students gain valuable work experience while enrolled and jobs in Ohio after graduation. We are developing new and exciting partnerships with business and industry who rely on a highly trained and capable workforce to fill jobs. Our new partnerships with Dominion Energy, Nationwide Insurance, Ohio Mutual Insurance Company, Proctor & Gamble, JP Morgan Chase, Fifth Third Bank, US Savings Bank, Bank of America, Frontier Technologies, and others will expose our students to exciting career options and build relationships that give us access to resources. Innovation is in our DNA!

We are not standing still at Central State University and looking back over our history and resting on our laurels. Higher education transforms lives and is a proven pathway to upward mobility. We respectfully ask

for appropriate FY 2022 and FY 2023 funding that will allow us to continue educating our most important asset in Ohio, our citizens.

Again, thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education for all you do to support higher education in Ohio, and I am happy to answer any questions you might have.