



**Testimony before the House Education & Career Readiness Committee on
House Bill 154**

The Commercial Truck Driver Student Aid Program
Wednesday, May 31, 2017

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the House Education & Career Readiness Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 154, the Commercial Truck Driver Student Aid Program. I am Jack Hershey, president and CEO of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges. OACC represents the presidents and trustees of all 23 of Ohio's community colleges. Also joining me today is Dr. Jo Blondin, president of Clark State Community College, who will share the positive impact that HB 154 would have on Clark State's CDL training program and its students.

Ohio's community colleges are on the front line of helping the trucking industry meet the growing demand for trained drivers and we are pleased to join the Ohio Trucking Association in advancing this common sense proposal to meet the growing demand for trained drivers. HB 154 would create the Commercial Truck Driver Student Aid Program that provides a combination of grant and loan opportunities for students enrolled in a certified commercial truck driver's license school. CDL training programs can usually completed in 10 weeks or less and can lead directly to a job with a starting average salary of at least \$40,000. Despite this, our colleges know first-hand that prospective students often walk away from this promising opportunity because they simply cannot afford it. The majority of community college students are either working adults or are recently unemployed or displaced workers, so their limited ability to pay for these courses is usually primary barrier to pursuing a CDL certificate.

Ohio's community colleges and our business partners have long advocated that the government should fully embrace the value that short-term certificates have in providing a postsecondary pathway to a good paying job. Currently, both federal and state financial aid policy provide need-based or merit-based aid to students seeking an associate or bachelor's degree, regardless of their major or the type of institution they are attending. Yet, students in short-term training programs are told they cannot qualify for any assistance from either the federal Pell Grant program or the Ohio College Opportunity Grant program. This runs counterintuitive to sound workforce policy aimed at addressing the skills gap and creates unnecessary barriers from pursuing short-term training programs that lead directly to good paying careers for many low or moderate-income individuals.

By establishing the Commercial Truck Driver Aid Program, HB 154 is a smart step toward helping deliver a critical need for one of Ohio's top industries by helping more Ohioans take the leap into this in-demand field. Chairman Brenner and members of the House Education Committee, once again thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.