

**House Bill 16 Proponent Testimony
Senate Higher Education Committee
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Chair Kunze, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about House Bill 16. My name is Steve Tugend, I chair the Central Ohio Defense Group and am an attorney at Kegler Brown Hill + Ritter, and I offer this testimony as a proponent of House Bill 16 sponsored by Representative Perales.

The Central Ohio Defense Group is an organization comprised of government, nonprofit and corporate members that is concerned about preserving and growing defense-related jobs in the Central Ohio Region. The members of the group include Columbus 2020, the City of Columbus, the Columbus Partnership, the Columbus Regional Airport Authority, the City of Canal Winchester, Battelle, the Columbus Chamber of Commerce, the City of Whitehall, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, The Ohio State University, Franklin County, the Heath-Newark-Licking County Port Authority, and Kegler, Brown, Hill + Ritter.

The impact of Ohio's Department of Defense (DoD) employers in our region is significant. The DoD payroll for about 14,000 jobs is just under \$800 million annually and this yields an economic impact of about \$3 billion.

And we need to be vigilant in our protection of these jobs and resulting economic impact. Every few years, the Department of Defense undertakes a process known as Base Realignment and Closure (or "BRAC") where the country's military installations are evaluated using a cost benefit analysis. Those installations that score well are kept open or even expanded. Those that score poorly are closed. It has been since 2005 since the Pentagon last went through a BRAC process, so we believe that the next one is long overdue.

Increasingly, the Pentagon has indicated that one of the key evaluation criteria that will be considered in the next round of BRAC will be how military-friendly the installation's state laws are.

It is for this reason that the Central Ohio Defense Group is interested in House Bill 16. In short, the legislation, if it becomes law, will make Ohio a more military-friendly state and, as a result, a more attractive site for military missions and jobs.

House Bill 16 qualifies active duty military service members, and their spouses and dependents, for in-state tuition at state institutions of higher education. Essentially it will help reduce the cost of education for active duty service members and their eligible family members. We appreciate the commendable sacrifices that our brave service men and women make, as well as their family

members, having to move around the country and military bases around the world on a frequent basis.

While Ohio's universities have varying levels of support for our Armed Forces members and their dependents, this legislation will bring consistency statewide by waiving the one-year residency requirement and immediately making these individuals and their family members eligible for in-state tuition rates. This will be of great assistance to reducing the economic burden of attending postsecondary educational institutions for service members who wish to further their education and their families in Ohio.

From my experience, the importance of the BRAC process necessitates that our state ensure that its military facilities have both the physical and legal infrastructure that is supportive of military missions. This proposed legislation advances that goal. The U.S. Department of Defense is more likely to locate military installations and maintain them in states that are supportive of those who have worn our country's uniform.

This bill helps those in the military and their families save money on post-secondary education. In my view, Ohio is not sending a great message to the Pentagon by imposing this barrier to qualifying for in-state tuition rates. The least Ohio can do is to ease this barrier to help make our military families more welcome in this state and to better position us to attract and retain military jobs.

Chair Kunze and members of the committee, I thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.