



Testimony before the Senate Higher Education Committee

House Bill 9 – Improving Credit Transfer

January 16, 2020

Chairwoman Kunze, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 9 (HB 9). My name is Jack Hershey, President and CEO of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges, which represents the trustees and presidents of Ohio's twenty-three public community colleges.

The overarching goal of HB 9 is to help more students complete a postsecondary degree or credential. We recognize that by improving Ohio's transfer system, we will help more students complete their degrees on time without excess credit or costs. From OACC's perspective, this bill challenges the state and our institutions of higher education to work collaboratively to identify ways that will improve communication, practices and policies to enhance the transfer process to ensure the system is working *for* the students.

In short, the University System of Ohio can do better and I do not believe that is a statement that anyone would or should disagree with.

For the past several years Ohio has been working to meet the Complete to Compete goal of having 65% of working aged adults earn a degree, certificate or postsecondary credential by 2025. We face a severe shortage of skilled and prepared workers to meet the current and future in-demand jobs in this state – especially in high-growth fields like healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and technology that will drive the modern economy. Currently, Ohio ranks 33rd for overall educational attainment with a statewide postsecondary attainment rate of 44.6%, which is three percentage points below the national average of 47.6%.

While Ohio has made improvements in degree attainment, the reality is that more needs to be done if we are going to meet the state's Complete to Compete goal. We have heard from businesses throughout the state that a workforce crisis is upon us. In order to ensure our workforce has the skills and training necessary to fill both the current and future job openings in our state, Ohio needs to think and move boldly with innovative and inclusive postsecondary proposals aimed at increasing both access and completion for students.

Through the Ohio Transfer Module (OTM), the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) has developed a very good system for how credit is articulated and transferred among Ohio's public colleges and universities. Students are guaranteed the transfer of a large number of specific courses among Ohio's public colleges and universities with equitable treatment in the application of credits to admissions and degree requirements. The OTM is set up so that students know they can complete specified general education courses anywhere in the public system by assuring that the set of learning outcomes are the same, regardless if the general education course is taken at a public university main campus, university branch campus, or

community college while protecting the integrity of the credential and degree programs of our institutions of higher education. OTM is a nationally-recognized model thanks to a lot of hard work and commitment from faculty and staff postsecondary partners throughout the state.

OTM is a good foundational structure for transfer and articulation. Recent laws like the Guaranteed Transfer Pathways built upon the OTM to help students who complete an associate degree at a community college, at our substantially lower tuition rates, be able to transfer to a public university knowing that their entire degree is guaranteed to be applied toward their bachelor degree requirements.

But all of this does not mean there still aren't ways we can strengthen how transfer works in this state for career technical, community college and university students. Every year, tens of thousands of students transfer between our public institutions. While the goal of the OTM is to ensure that transfer students are not forced to retake the same course, we unfortunately know that is not always the case. For some transfer students, credits are still denied or they are told that while the course credit is technically granted, they are still advised to retake the course at the receiving institution.

Ohio's public colleges and universities work every day to prepare students and make the transfer process work for them, but the reality is sometimes we all come up short. And when we do, discouraged students often do not know who to turn to and ODHE is left with little enforcement power. We should be making the process as easy as possible for these students while praising them for making wise academic and financial decisions that best fits their personal, family and career needs. Further stressing the need to increase transparency and guidance is the fact that our institutions are serving more first generation and nontraditional aged students than ever before.

National studies show that a large percentage of students entering community college want to eventually earn a bachelor's degree; and yet, Ohio ranks just 33rd out of 50 states in the number of transfer students who started at a community college and earned a bachelor's degree at a four-year institution. The question is why does this happen and what can we learn from policy levers and partnerships implemented in other states who strengthened their transfer systems and improved credit transfer efficiency for students.

In conclusion, we know this is not a simple problem with a simple solution. However, pretending everything works perfectly for every student should not be a strategy Ohio embraces. Instead, Ohio should continue to look at ways to improve the overall process for students and we believe HB 9 is a step in the right direction of helping more students pursue their degree without the burden of accumulating unnecessary costs or credits. Tackling the impending workforce attainment gaps head-on will require in-depth analyses and collaboration to evaluate and advance new student-focused approaches.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.