



Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors

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Testimony of Martin Kich, PhD
Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors
Before the House Finance Committee
Representative Scott Oelslager, Chair
April 15, 2021

Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and Members of the Finance Committee:

My name is Martin Kich, and I am President of the Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), which represents 6,000 faculty at public and private institutions of higher education across the state.

I am here today to express my association's views on House Bill 110, the state operating budget.

The Need for Reinvestment

It is important to remember why we have public colleges and universities in the first place, and why they are worthy of investment.

It used to be the case that a college education was for only the privileged few. Public institutions were created to give all citizens the opportunity to advance their educations and enter careers that otherwise were out of reach. Public colleges and universities helped to create and sustain the middle class, the backbone of our economy.

While public institutions are less expensive compared to their private counterparts, students at public institutions are nonetheless accumulating substantial debt to fund their educations. It doesn't do our economy much good if public institutions leave students saddled with tremendous debt and unable to buy homes or cars or to start families even well after they have graduated.

In the last state budget, the General Assembly allocated less funding for State Share of Instruction (SSI) than it did in 2006 (when adjusted for inflation). This trend is simply unsustainable if we are serious about student retention and increasing the number of degree-holders.

Moreover, in the last calendar year, Gov. DeWine cut SSI by \$164 million. We appreciate that the governor restored \$100 million of that funding, but there needs to be more long-term stability and a greater commitment to funding higher education. The 1.9% increase proposed to SSI over the biennium fails to keep pace with inflation and amounts to a cut. Worse, this sort of reduction in real funding has been occurring with some regularity over the last four decades. Our institutions have been doing more with less for quite some time, and at a point, that amounts, inevitably, to doing less.

While the legislature has done more in the recent past to boost Ohio's main source of need-based aid – the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG) – that fund has been drastically reduced from what it was 15 years ago. Students who attend community colleges and regional campuses – most often the entry point for students with the greatest financial need – are typically ineligible for OCOG. This restriction should be re-examined.

In order to provide a quality of education that leads to degrees with value, Ohio must start to reinvest in higher education. Without increased investment from the state, we will see the academic missions of our colleges and universities continue to be gutted through faculty and program attrition. We also will see staff lose good-paying jobs, many times in regions where such jobs are scarce. Investment in higher education always generates significant returns – for graduates, communities, and the state.

Part of the discussion regarding reinvestment in education at all levels must involve the financial status of teacher pensions. The estimated value of the pension active educators will receive is less than the amounts they are contributing to the State Teachers Retirement System (STRS). In addition, retired educators have had their healthcare benefits reduced and cost of living adjustment suspended. Promises to current and retired educators have been broken. Unless more is done to shore up the pension system, Ohio will not be able to attract people to become K-12 teachers and college faculty.

The General Assembly must seriously consider revenue options. There is low-hanging fruit such as eliminating the “LLC loophole,” which is widely regarded as an unreasonable tax carve out except by those who directly benefit from it. We also hope that the better revenue projections by the Legislative Service Commission will result in more money being directed to SSI and OCOG. More tax cuts is not the answer.

Quality Matters

Ohio must strive for greater affordability, but we also must ensure quality. There is a body of research that shows that student performance and retention is improved by having full-time faculty.

Unfortunately, quality has been under fire for decades as institutions have reduced full-time faculty numbers and replaced those faculty with armies of part-time faculty, also known as adjuncts. Adjuncts often make for good instructors, but because they are paid poverty wages and permitted to teach only a couple of courses at any one institution so that the institution can avoid providing healthcare coverage, they are busy piecing together a living by teaching at multiple institutions. They usually do not have the same strong ties to a single institution and are not as available to meet with students outside of the classroom.

By our best count, in the last year alone, over 500 full-time faculty positions have been terminated at Ohio's public colleges and universities, and at least a few hundred more positions have been eliminated through attrition and early retirement incentives. Many students are paying more in tuition and fees; yet less of that money is being spent on their instruction.

More Focus on Quality Education, Less on “Time to Degree”

“Time to degree” has become the latest mantra in Ohio higher education. Rather than increasing investment to make earning a degree more affordable, the state has pursued ways to

speed students through their education. This shortcutting is shortchanging students out of a complete education.

We support that gifted students ought to be able to earn college credit through the College Credit Plus (CCP) program. However, CCP has proliferated too quickly and without sufficient time to study its impact. CCP strictly should be taught by college professors and be a way to expose students to the rigor of college courses. Early studies suggest that students who have succeeded and even excelled in courses not taught by professors often do not perform at the same level when enrolled full-time in colleges and universities.

One of the biggest issues that our members have observed with CCP is that students are encouraged to take these CCP courses during high school or earlier, but they might not take a subsequent course in the same subject matter until years later in college. By and large, students are not retaining the material, which is setting them up for failure for upper division coursework. This pattern is especially true in the math and sciences.

The piece of paper that someone receives when they earn a degree is not education. The reason college graduates have better lifetime earnings than those with only a high school diploma is because of the skills that faculty help them to develop. Education is not the mere acquisition of the physical degree, and we must not lose sight of that by watering down the challenges of a college education.

Ohio's faculty are proud of the role that we play in educating Ohioans – preparing them to enter the workforce and to be good citizens. As our state recovers from the economic impact of the pandemic, it is more important than ever to reinvest in quality higher education. Higher education is a public good that benefits all of us.