



**Proponent Testimony of Rachael Collyer, Ohio Student Association
House Bill 33
House Finance Committee
April 20th, 2023**

Chair Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Bride Rose Sweeney, and members of the Ohio House Finance Committee,

My name is Rachael Collyer, and in addition to being a lifelong Ohio resident and a graduate of the Ohio State University, I am the program director of the Ohio Student Association (OSA). OSA is a statewide grassroots organization with student-led chapters at nine college campuses across the state. One of the core focuses of our organization is supporting college students to make their voices heard around higher education policy. Many of our members work multiple jobs as full-time college students and still struggle to afford to pay for school and cover basic necessities like groceries and rent, all while watching their student loan debt pile up. When the barriers to higher education are this high, we exclude and punish young people for wanting a better life for themselves and their families.

I write to you today on behalf of the Ohio Student Association and all of our members across Ohio to share our thoughts on the FY 24-25 budget with regard to higher education, and on the changes made by the House to the governor's proposed budget. We applaud Gov. DeWine and Chancellor Gardner for their proposed budget, and their clear intent to strengthen higher education in Ohio. We share the goal to help ensure every Ohioan, no matter the color of their skin, their zip code, or how much money they have in the bank, can pursue their educational dreams after high school.

The governor's proposal would provide a 3% increase in SSI for each year in the FY 24-25 budget. This proposed increase is a step in the right direction, but will not keep up with inflation. The current version of the House substitute budget bill would cut the proposed 3% increase in half, which is a step backwards that will undercut Ohio's ability to achieve its attainment goal that 65% of Ohioans aged 25-64 will have a degree, certificate, or other postsecondary credential of value in the workplace.

We were thrilled to see \$40 million being put towards supporting students who face barriers and challenges to attaining a degree through the Access Challenge line item of the governor's proposed budget. These funds are critically needed and should not be cut. We advocate for the Access Challenge line item to be restored to the House substitute budget bill.



We were also thrilled to see the governor's proposed increase in funds for the Ohio College Opportunity Grant, and then dismayed to see those funds subsequently cut down in the House substitute budget bill. A truly substantial increase in awards like that proposed by the governor will go a long way towards helping Ohioans pursue their educational goals and is a critical investment in the future of our communities and our state. We also urge that OCOG be restructured into a first-dollar grant so that people can use the money for things beyond just tuition (like books, housing, etc.) and that it be expanded to include community college and regional campus students. My niece is a freshman at Cleveland State University, and while I was fortunate to be able to help her out by paying for her textbooks this past semester, so many other students like her struggle to be able to afford their books for school, which regularly add up to hundreds of dollars each semester. Making OCOG a first-dollar grant would help ease this burden for thousands of students across Ohio.

Finally, we reiterate our belief that Ohio must change how it addresses the hundreds of thousands of students and former students who are stuck educationally and in their jobs because of outstanding institutional debt. Allowing schools more flexibility on how they collect debt and requiring them to release transcripts when students and former students need them to apply for jobs, as Ohio policymakers did during the last budget process, was a good first step, but we must do more to build a stronger Ohio by removing the office of the state attorney general from its role as a debt collector for public higher education institutions in our state.

We are elated about the progress in the governor's proposed budget, and on behalf of the Ohio Student and all of our members, I call upon you, the members of the House Finance Committee, to do the right thing and ensure that you do not undercut that progress. We all benefit when all of us have a fair shot at getting an education that helps us fulfill our potential and pursue our dreams. Cutting proposed programs and funding that would bring us closer to delivering on the promise of higher education for all Ohioans will hold our students and our state back.

Sincerely,
Rachael Collyer
Ohio Student Association
rachael@ohorganizing.org