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Testimony for Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education
Regarding HB 33

Chair Manning, Ranking Member Jarrells, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education, I am honored to be here today along with my colleagues Jack Hershey, President and CEO of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges, and President David Harrison of Columbus State Community College to share my support and perspectives on HB 33 as it relates the role of community colleges in creating a highly-skilled and diverse workforce to fuel Ohio's robust economic opportunities.

More than a decade ago, the Lumina Foundation issued "A Stronger Nation: Learning Beyond High School Builds American Talent" as a call to action to raise educational attainment across the country to build economic competitiveness and individual and family prosperity. This report challenged states to embark on a journey leading to 60% of working-age adults having a degree or credential of job market value by 2025.

Ohio has made progress toward this goal, moving the needle from 34.7% (2009) to 51.2%, according to Lumina's latest report. But more certainly needs to be done given the significant economic growth and potential in our state. The need in Ohio for a highly-skilled and diverse workforce has been accelerated and increased by unprecedented opportunities such as Ohio becoming the epicenter of the Silicon Heartland, the emergence of electric vehicles, talent crises in healthcare, information technology, education, and more. We are amid a generational opportunity that relies on Ohio's higher education system to do more than ever and is especially dependent on Ohio's community colleges, as a vast majority, upwards of 70%, of these jobs require associate degree level education and technical training.

HB 33 offers several proposals critical to expanding education and training that need to happen urgently. I will focus my comments on two essential requests that are essential for developing Ohio's workforce for this critical moment: 1) Workforce funding targeted for in-demand fields and short-term training, and 2) a College Credit Plus Innovative Workforce Waiver Program.

#1 - Workforce Funding Targeted for In-demand Fields and Short-Term Training

Several times a week, I am meeting with employers who need talent right now in order to grow. They share they can't wait two or four years for workers to be job-ready. At the same time, both high school students and working-age adults are often reluctant to commit to a two- or four-year degree program as 75% of our students must work while attending school. Instead, short-term training can fit with their lives and is viewed as more attainable. Short-term training programs offer a viable solution for employers and residents rapidly. We know this from experience at Lorain County Community College.

In 2019, just before the COVID-19 pandemic, LCCC, with support from the Ohio Department of Higher Education Short-Term Certificate Program, launched 20 Free Fast Track programs which:

- align to in-demand jobs (such as healthcare, information technology, and manufacturing) in partnership with local employers
- allow participants to earn an industry-recognized credential making them "job ready"
- can be completed in 16 weeks or less
- embed career and academic advising
- provide significant wrap-around services

Launching this program in advance of the disruptions caused by the pandemic would prove to be a lifeline for displaced individuals and a necessary talent strategy for local employers. Since 2019, LCCC has expanded its Fast Track offerings from 20 to more than 65 Fast Track Programs, and the results warrant scaling further as a way to build the skilled workforce Ohio needs.

Program highlights:

- The program has served over 1,500 students.
- 40% are minorities (identified as Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino)
- 70% completed the program or are still enrolled
- 65% reported being displaced from employment in the last year
- 86% plan to immediately enter the workforce
- 60% plan to continue their educational pathway

Jasmine Jackson of Elyria is one of LCCC's Fast Track students. Jasmine, 31, lost her job with a freight-forwarding company when it closed in January 2022. She enrolled in LCCC's Fast Track in Cyber Security, which includes an earn-and-learn requirement. In May 2022, within four months of starting, Jackson began a paid internship at MCPc, a global software security and device company. As a Secure Operations Center Analyst Intern, Jackson monitors client network alerts and follows troubleshooting and escalation procedures. Jasmine continues to grow in her role with MCPc and is on track to earn an Associate of Applied Science in Cyber and Information Security.

Offering short-term training programs such as LCCC's Fast Tracks as on-ramps to employment and providing a stackable educational pathway toward an associate degree and beyond is a solution Ohio needs right now. LCCC has managed to braid funding together to help students like Jasmine, as these short-term training programs do not qualify for Pell support. Additionally, Ohio's state share of instruction (SSI) does not provide funding to community colleges for such short-term programs. Yet, employers desperately need our colleges to invest in building these short-term programs with new curriculum, technology investments, student supports and to deliver them quickly. Essentially there is no stable funding source for what is perhaps one of the best returns on investments in terms of workforce development. Ohio, through HB 33, has the opportunity to infuse funding that can help create a scaled and sustainable foundation to support short-term education and training programs aligned to Ohio's in-demand fields.

To this end, on behalf of Ohio's community colleges, I encourage the legislature to:

- Maintain proposed funding levels for the Super RAPIDS and WorkFORCE Ohio programs to help colleges quickly build capacity in programs related to high-demand industries.
- Invest in a Workforce Ready Grant program that supports community college students pursuing a credential in an in-demand field.
- Infuse added support into community colleges' state share of instruction formula restricted specifically to short-term workforce education programs in high-demand fields.

#2 - College Credit Plus Innovative Workforce Waiver Program

Representative Manning, thank you for your pioneering work to create the legislation in Ohio for College Credit Plus. It is changing lives for students and their families. This past fall, Lorain County Community College and our local K-12 partners celebrated ten years of the impact of College Credit Plus. In 2013, as College Credit Plus rolled out, Lorain County had 20% of high school graduates earning some college credit. Fast forward ten years, 45% of the 2022 Lorain County graduating class earned, on average, 20 college credits from Lorain County Community College, saving their families \$6 million in college costs. The impact of College Credit Plus continues well beyond when students graduate from high school. **We know that students who enroll in just one college course during high school are twice as likely to earn a degree or credential within six years of high school graduation.** College Credit Plus is indeed moving the needle in raising educational attainment.

We are thrilled that nearly half of all Lorain County high school graduates are getting an early start on a college education that prepares them for future jobs, but that also means another 50% are at risk of being left behind. Only 14% of high school graduates who do not enroll in college in the fall after graduation have a college degree or certificate by age 25. This "lost generation" is unlikely to enroll in college immediately after high school and are landing in low-wage jobs. With unprecedented workforce demands and a shrinking high school population that won't return to 2015 levels until 2050, Ohio, to remain economically competitive, cannot afford to lose its high school graduates to low-wage jobs.

In this biennial budget, Ohio has an opportunity to leverage its renowned College Credit Plus program to open up these opportunities to many more students and prepare them for workforce pathways to good jobs: by implementing a policy to create a College Credit Plus Innovative Workforce Waiver Program.

Currently, College Credit Plus is only open to students who test college ready in math or English or with a grade point average of 3.0 or higher unless there is a specific exception for a particular school, program, and set of students. Through a College Credit Plus Innovative Workforce

Waiver Program, Chancellor Gardner could approve pathways that allow more students, who have an interest and aptitude, to take specific career-technical education courses aligned to in-demand jobs with the ability to earn an industry-recognized credential along with a high school diploma.

In Lorain County, we've had the opportunity to pilot such a concept, and we know it works. In 2021, with support from an Ohio Department of Education RemotEDx Industry Recognized Credentials grant, Avon and LCCC piloted *Bridges to Success*. Avon Local School District approached Lorain County Community College to develop a career exploration program for 19 at-risk high school seniors who still needed a college or career plan for post-high school graduation. This year-long pilot, delivered both at the high school and on-site at LCCC, allowed these students to identify their personal values, strengths, and interests and how they aligned with in-demand careers in Cyber & Information Technology, Health & Wellness, Smart Manufacturing, and Public & Human Services. Students explored careers through an online student development course for which they earned college credit. Through hands-on, interactive lab experiences led by faculty, and industry representatives, students identified how each sector aligned with their strengths and interests and researched career opportunities and local industry employers. Students received wrap-around support services, including financial aid workshops, assistance completing FAFSA applications, and other scholarships such as LCCC's Choose Ohio First.

When the program started, none of the students had plans to attend college; however, upon completion:

- 89% enrolled in a post-secondary institution or the military in the Fall semester after high-school graduation, with 58% matriculating to LCCC.
- 7 of the 11 students at LCCC are in a STEM or business pathway.

Vince Ventresco is one of the students who chose a STEM field because of *Bridges* and is currently pursuing a degree in LCCC's microelectronics manufacturing program. Because of the *Bridges* program, Vince went from facing high school graduation without a future plan to preparing to be part of the workforce that will fuel Ohio's Silicon Heartland. In selecting LCCC's MEMS program, Vince and other students are on the right path, as LCCC is one of eight colleges and universities leading Intel's workforce development program in Ohio.

Since delivering the pilot program with Avon High School, seven districts have approached LCCC to explore how *Bridges* could be offered in their district. Programs like *Bridges* prepare high school seniors who are on track to graduate but lack a post-high school plan to identify their "what's next" and put a plan in place to pursue it. We see similar success rates of other career-technical education programs, like Tech Prep, that, as currently structured, offer only articulated credits instead of leveraging the benefits of College Credit Plus. A College Credit Plus Innovative Workforce Waiver would support scaling programs like *Bridges* and ensure that all students can pursue in-demand, family-sustaining careers here in Ohio.

In closing, Ohio is at the threshold of a transformational economic opportunity on the scale of when auto and steel built up Ohio's industrial base. Community colleges were created for moments like this. Ohio's 23 community colleges are the state's workforce engines, and with the proper investment as part of HB 33, we can drive economic growth and prosperity for future generations.

Chair Manning and members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to share these perspectives. I welcome any questions.