



Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors

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Testimony of Sara Kaminski, Executive Director
Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors
Before the House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education
Representative Randy Gardner, Chair
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Chairman Gardner, Ranking Member Garland, and distinguished members of the Higher Education Subcommittee: my name is Sara Kaminski, and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). The Ohio Conference AAUP represents nearly 4,500 college and university professors at both public and private institutions of higher education across the State of Ohio.

The mission of the Ohio Conference AAUP is to promote the greater social good that comes from a dynamic, active professoriate – professors being the backbone of quality education and research in higher education. To achieve that goal, we work to preserve and advance academic freedom – the right to engage in good teaching and important research without fear of being terminated for political reasons; and to promote shared governance, so that important decisions are made only with the input from those who must carry out those decisions in the best interests of students and the general public.

I come to you today to share the thoughts and opinions of the Ohio Conference AAUP regarding House Bill 153, the state budget bill. My comments will focus on two key proposals: charter universities and increasing faculty teaching loads.

Proponents of charter universities describe the idea as a simple one: Public universities would receive less money in state subsidies in return for less state government regulation. This “flexibility” will then supposedly lead to cures for all of our higher education ills. Beyond this vague description, different parties continue to describe the concept of charter universities in different ways – so at this point, the Legislature is being asked to endorse a general concept without knowing exactly what it means.

If we look at past comments on what “charter university” means, however, its proponents have mentioned numerous items that make it clear the idea would undermine the whole

concept of *public* universities – and instead make them semi-private institutions that still take taxpayer monies, but have little or no accountability to the public. This is an approach that will ultimately hurt Ohio’s students and future economic growth.

For generations, Ohio’s taxpayers and elected officials have made a commitment to providing a high-quality, affordable, and accessible public-college education to the next generation. In fact, our current Governor and at least 82 out of the 132 members of the current General Assembly have enjoyed the benefits of an Ohio public-university education. Now, under the pretext of the state’s current revenue crisis and the purported need for “flexibility,” the Governor is proposing that we all abandon this commitment and, in quite real terms, begin the process of dismantling Ohio’s public university system.

One element frequently mentioned by proponents of “charter universities” is abandoning the Legislature’s role in controlling the growth of tuition. The experience of “charter universities” in Virginia has shown that, once the Legislature walks away from its role in safeguarding affordability, this, coupled with less state funding, is a sure recipe for exorbitant increases in tuition.

In Virginia, which made similar restructuring moves in recent years, tuition has increased by double-digit percentages. Virginia Commonwealth University alone increased its tuition by 24 percent this year. Additionally, the University of Virginia has increased its tuition by 50.5 percent over the last five years.

In Ohio, this would make it even more difficult than it has already become for the average Ohio family to send their children to college. Students will either choose not to attend college or will graduate with an inordinate amount of debt — both of which will equate to less spending potential in our economy. It will also be a bar to adult Ohioans who wish to return to college to upgrade their skills and compete in new industries.

Another element commonly cited by “charter university” proponents is the abandonment of open records rules and much of the reporting now required to bodies such as the Ohio Board of Regents. This inevitably means a lack of accountability and oversight. Taxpayer dollars would be spent, yet taxpayers would have no means of holding these institutions accountable. Citizens and the news media would have no means by which to shed light on decisions about how taxpayer money is being spent ---and who is really making those decisions and benefiting from them. Cronyism, favoritism, nepotism, and in some cases even corruption, all are likely to creep back into our University systems when no one has the right to ask questions and examine documents.

We are also concerned about the proposed changes in construction requirements that would do away with competitive prime bidding. The combination of exempting universities from public records laws and construction regulations that do not include competitive

prime bidding is, again, a recipe for corruption and the misuse of taxpayer money and tuition dollars.

As noted by various press organizations, proponents of “charter universities” also clearly see them as union-free zones. This makes sense, since unions are often among the most vocal on-campus critics of administrative financial decisions and priorities. Without unions and without open records law requirements, who will be left to safeguard the taxpayers’ money?

Furthermore, because there is a national market for university professors, who are among the most mobile members of the American work force, this attack on faculty collective bargaining may mean we will lose some of the best and brightest professors. AAUP contracts have been, for decades, one of the only mechanisms by which faculty can fight to ensure that salaries and benefits keep pace with national markets; without them, it will be all too easy for Administrations to continue to redirect funds toward ever-expanding administration apparatus and administrator salaries. As a result, we will not be giving our students the best education possible.

The real problem with Ohio’s public university system is not a lack of flexibility or collective bargaining — it is that it is woefully underfunded by the state; and of the funds it receives, too much money is spent on unnecessary administration. Even conservative think tanks like the Goldwater Institute have found that “administrative bloat” is the largest factor behind rising tuition costs and waste in higher education. And Ohio’s public colleges and universities are no exception to the pervasive problem of administrative bloat.

According to data from *Grapevine*, Ohio ranked 41st in the nation in state support for higher education when measured as state spending per \$1,000 of personal income, and 42nd in the nation when measured by per capita spending. Yet “charter university” proponents claim that a lack of flexibility is the primary structural, financial problem faced by our public universities.

Using data from the Delta Cost Study, which is derived from the Integrated Post-Secondary Data System (IPEDS), Dr. Rudy Fichtenbaum, Professor of Economics at Wright State University, has calculated that for all two and four-year public institutions of higher education in Ohio, between 1987 and 2008, spending on instruction and academic support increased 179 percent. In contrast, spending for institutional support and student services (mostly administrative spending) increased 270 percent over the same period. Given this, we are baffled as to why the crafters of the budget bill seem to think that significant cost savings will come from assigning yet more work to faculty members, instead of focusing on where the real cost of higher education lies: administration. Ohio’s institutions are spending far too much on administrators and not enough on instruction.

The provision of the bill that mandates full-time faculty to teach one additional class every other year fails to take into account the myriad of factors that determine how much teaching faculty are assigned. Universities are complex organizations, consisting of different colleges, schools and departments, each with different missions. Teaching loads at our universities have been carefully crafted to allow faculty to carry out these distinctive missions.

Faculty at our state institutions of higher education are huge economic drivers – they bring in millions of research dollars into the Ohio economy every year through grants. Placing this kind of arbitrary mandate on their workloads will distract from their research and innovation. In his testimony on April 5, Inter-University Council President Bruce Johnson called this measure a “solution in search of a problem,” and on this one point, we could not agree more with him.

A one-size-fits-all edict from the state will impair the ability of faculty to carry out their distinctive missions and make it difficult to retain our most productive faculty—and seems completely illogical under the theory that universities need *more* flexibility. How is it that this kind of micromanaging is consistent with the claim that Universities need to be freed from purportedly burdensome regulations?

In summary, the “charter university” idea is at best a Pandora’s Box that the Legislature is being asked to endorse with details to come later. At worst, it is the first step toward semi-privatization of one of Ohio’s most precious public assets and a betrayal of this generation’s access to an affordable college education – something that previous generations were able to count on.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions that the committee may have.