

Testimony before the House Finance Committee on House Bill 64
Jim Reynolds, President of Wilmington College

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Thank you Chairperson Smith, Ranking Member Driehaus and members of the House Finance Committee for allowing me to testify on behalf of Ohio's independent, nonprofit colleges and universities. My name is Jim Reynolds and it's my privilege to serve as the president of Wilmington College. I also want to thank Speaker Rosenburger and Senator Peterson for their continued strong support of our institution and the students who attend Wilmington College.

I am here today to thank you for your past support of the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (often referred to by its acronym OCOG) and to ask for your continued support of OCOG in a way that would ensure that students who participate in the program currently will not see a decrease in grant funding.

Perhaps like many of you, I am a first-generation college student. My parents weren't able to afford to go to college but realized that for our family to have any chance of upward mobility and the realization of the American dream, education and hard work would be a requirement for our success. They both worked very hard to provide the opportunity for my brother and I to attend college and I will always be grateful for their sacrifices that provided Mike and I the possibility of success in our lives.

Now that I serve as the president of Wilmington College, I realize the value of the gift that my parents gave me. Almost 45% of the students that attend

Wilmington are the first in their families to attend college. They come from backgrounds that are varied but there are some common characteristics that describe them. They come to us with a strong work ethic and the desire to be successful. Their families are not by any definition wealthy and many of our students work part time jobs to help fund their education. What impresses me most about the students who attend Wilmington is that they often put others first, through community service, campus activities and the many civic organizations to which they belong.

At Wilmington, we have had deep and thoughtful conversations about affordability and access because many of our students come to us with solid but not stellar academic backgrounds. They choose to come to Wilmington because of the supportive and caring community that we have built on campus. As we discuss the ability of students to pay for their college experience, we often focus on the amount of debt that students incur to attend our College. I'm very proud to say that our average debt per student at graduation is well below the national average but it remains a concern for us.

Last year, almost 1 in every three Wilmington College students were recipients of the Ohio College Opportunity Grant – not surprising since almost 4 out of every ten students on our campus are eligible for Pell Grant assistance. The total amount of institutional support was just over \$640,000. The assistance given by the OCOG was instrumental in the ability of many of our students to start and continue at our College.

As you consider the biennial budget, I want to offer my thanks for the increase in funding in OCOG that you are considering. These dollars can provide additional access for many students to the high quality education

provided in part by independent, nonprofit colleges such as Wilmington. However, as you consider the final language in the budget bill, I would respectfully ask that you consider allocating funding to the Ohio College Opportunity Grant such that no sector of higher education in Ohio is negatively impacted. Holding harmless the grant allocation to colleges and universities like Wilmington College will mean additional and continued access for students who represent the many hard working Ohioans who are looking for a piece of the American dream for their children – just like my mom and dad did almost forty years ago.

We are very proud to provide an educational experience to our students that literally can change their family tree – our request is for your support and partnership to help those deserving students to continue to have these opportunities at Wilmington College.

I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have of me.