

**THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON**



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

**GARY L. MILLER**  
PRESIDENT

**BEFORE THE HOUSE HIGHER EDUCATION AND CAREER READINESS  
COMMITTEE**

**REPRESENTATIVE LAURA LANESE  
CHAIR**

**TESTIMONY  
OF  
GARY L. MILLER  
PRESIDENT  
THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON**

**April 5, 2022**

A PUBLIC URBAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITY, INSPIRED BY OUR PEOPLE, PLACE AND PROMISES.

**BUCHTEL HALL 114 • AKRON, OH 44325-4702  
330-972-7869 OFFICE • 330-972-8652 FAX • PRESIDENT@UAKRON.EDU**

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Chairwoman Lanese, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the House Higher Education and Career Readiness Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit written proponent testimony for HB 514 on behalf of The University of Akron. My name is Gary Miller, and I am the president of The University of Akron (UA).

The University of Akron is one of Ohio's most influential public urban research universities. We serve a diverse population of more than 16,000 students from across the country and around the world, offering unique, top-ranked and in-demand associate, bachelor's, master's, doctoral and professional degree programs in engineering, business, health care, the arts and sciences, education and law. Nationally renowned for our STEM programs, we enjoy strong relationships with industries such as polymers, advanced materials and engineering. In fact, UA was recently named as the top university in the world for polymer science and plastics engineering, according to global ranking site EduRank. Our metropolitan campus, located in the heart of Ohio's fifth-largest city, is surrounded by thousands of businesses, including Fortune 500 companies, giving students access to countless internship, co-op and career opportunities.

Preparing students for successful careers in Ohio is a priority for UA, which is why we support HB 514. I have been involved in higher education for more than 30 years, serving in leadership roles in universities in various states, and this is one of the most innovative pieces of legislation directed at higher education that I have seen. This legislation will help recruit and retain the best and brightest young people for Ohio's workforce needs and will complement UA's efforts to educate Ohio's current and future workforce. Let me elaborate on how this legislation will enhance what we are doing at The University of Akron.

### **Internships and Co-Ops**

I am pleased that this legislation will give businesses tax credits for providing students with paid internships and co-ops. UA understands the value of these real-world experiences and provides numerous opportunities for our students. In fact, when we surveyed our bachelor degree graduates from Spring 2020, 77 percent of the respondents told us they participated in experiential learning of some type while at UA. When we focus on our engineering majors, 100 percent of respondents participated in experiential learning opportunities, many of which were paid co-ops.

### **Career Opportunities**

This legislation also seeks to retain Ohio's students after their internship or co-op experience so that they can begin their career here. If a graduating college student takes a full-time job offer in Ohio, this legislation allows them to receive a 100 percent refundable state income tax for up to three years of employment. This is a great incentive and something we would certainly promote to our students. Our data show that roughly 73 percent of our alumni remain in Ohio; this incentive could entice even more UA students to stay in the state.

### **Choose Ohio First Program**

In addition to retaining our students in Ohio, we also want to recruit the best and the brightest out-of-state students with the goal of making them Ohioans and valuable members of Ohio's workforce. I am pleased that this legislation will allocate additional Choose Ohio First Scholarships to recruit highly qualified out-of-state students for in-demand degree programs. The

University of Akron has had great success with the Choose Ohio First Program. In 2021, we were awarded \$5.8 million from the state — the largest amount among Ohio universities — in support of our Choose Ohio First Scholars Program. The program aims to recruit, nurture, and graduate more students in STEMM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics, medicine) fields, particularly students from backgrounds that are underrepresented in these fields. Students in our program have a year-to-year retention rate exceeding 90 percent, and a six-year graduation rate exceeding 75 percent, which is well above the national average six-year graduation rate for students in STEMM fields.

**Ohio College Opportunity Grants (OCOG)**

As a STEMM-focused university and a university of opportunity, UA is resolutely committed to making higher education accessible and affordable to all students. The Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG) program provides grant money to Ohio residents who demonstrate the highest levels of financial need. During the 2019-20 academic year, more than 3,000 University of Akron students received an Ohio College Opportunity Grant, totaling more than \$5 million. This legislation will allow students who have earned their associate degree to obtain an additional OCOG grant in pursuit of a four-year degree. This complements our current pathway to four-year degree programs through initiatives such as Direct Connect, which allows students to seamlessly transfer an associate degree from Stark State College to a bachelor's degree program at The University of Akron. Aligning the state of Ohio, its higher education institutions and the business community will ensure we retain the best and the brightest and increase the prosperity and economic outlook for our great state.

Thank you for allowing me to offer this testimony. I want to commend the bill's sponsors for their understanding of the vital role higher education plays in preparing the current and future workforce. I look forward to working with this committee and the General Assembly to continue providing students with an affordable and quality education that enables Ohio to graduate and retain its workforce.