



Proponent Testimony on the FY 2021-22 Capital Budget
Conference Committee on Senate Bill 310
December 17, 2020

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Oelslager and members of the Conference Committee on Senate Bill 310, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the FY 21-22 Capital Budget appropriations. I am Jack Hershey, president and CEO of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC), which represents the presidents and trustees of the public two-year institutions from throughout Ohio. I would like express our gratitude to Governor DeWine and the House and Senate leadership for agreeing to provide capital funds for Ohio's public institutions of higher education.

Amended Sub. SB 310 includes \$400 million in capital funding to support the recommended projects of Ohio's public institutions of higher education, of which \$100 million will to community colleges and \$300 million will go to public universities. The process within Ohio's community colleges began by examining a list of principles to ensure that college projects aligned with the state's overall priorities, which include:

- Focus on maintaining the investment the state has already made in existing campus facilities;
- Reflect the needs of today's student by strengthening their learning environments;
- Increase Ohio's complete advantage by capitalizing on our existing strengths,
- Strengthen our ability to respond to new or increased workforce development opportunities in the state; and,
- Encourage joint efforts to reduce costs and generate ongoing efficiencies.

All twenty-three community colleges evaluated their long-term capital plans and developed their requests with these priorities in mind. OACC has recommended projects that primarily focused on the need to repair, renovate or enhance our existing facilities and capital infrastructure. The overwhelming majority of the community college projects contained in Sub. SB 310 are dedicated to protecting the state's prior investments in our institutions, not for entirely new buildings. OACC's requests predominantly provide for a growing list of maintenance repairs for heating systems, electrical and plumbing systems, roof and window replacements, upgrades to existing classrooms or labs, as well as a growing need to increase spending on campus safety and security projects.

OACC also applauds state leaders for their ongoing support of the RAPIDS Grant program. By allocating \$7.6 million for this program, SB 310 will help our colleges acquire workforce-based training equipment that will be used to meet specific regional workforce training needs. As Ohio emerges from the disruption that the COVID pandemic has caused our economy, Ohio's community colleges know that we must be positioned to rapidly respond and be able to quickly retrain and upskill Ohio's workforce for Ohio to remain competitive. Employers are currently

considering what skill sets, certifications, or other special characteristics that their employees will need to have after the pandemic, that they didn't have going into it. In certain disciplines, the costs to purchase the equipment necessary for that training will be large, and the search for the funding to obtain that equipment can delay the workforce pipeline that the employer needs. The RAPIDS grant program provides flexibility, at the state level, to help our institutions to purchase the equipment and technology necessary to prepare these individuals when the workforce needs of our regional employers suddenly change.

In addition to providing critical funding to directly support our campuses, the capital budget also includes a number of statewide projects through the Ohio Department of Higher Education that would also benefit our colleges. The \$21.2 million for OARnet and the Ohio Supercomputer Center provides technology and broadband connectivity to connect our institutions with healthcare providers and governmental entities throughout the state. That system became critically important as we pivoted to predominantly online education during the pandemic.

During the collaborative capital planning process, OACC expressed our perspective that the state was overdue for a serious review of how the state's limited capital funds are allocated across the state's higher education system. We operate on less than half the tuition price of the state's average public university which often constrains our resources, which is why community colleges rely far more on state capital support to help fund our ongoing maintenance needs. We have long believed that the state's allocation primarily rewards institutions for having a large amount of campus square footage and that there are better measures that should be considered when making this allocation. This concern is not a new one for community colleges. We have raised it over the past several years and are very appreciative that the DeWine Administration has committed to listen to our concerns in advance of the next state capital budget.

Finally, know that we fully recognize the economic benefits of this funding to our communities. Whenever possible, colleges have prioritized projects that would put people (many of whom are our alumni) back to work quickly by preparing them for the jobs right in their region. Ohio's community colleges are grateful for the ongoing support of our state's leaders to help us deliver affordable and accessible educational and job training opportunities to meet the workforce needs of the employers and communities we serve.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our support of the state's capital budget.