

To the Editor:

We would like to call your attention to a state budget proposal that has the potential to adversely affect thousands of Ohio families who hope to send their children to independent colleges and universities, including Heidelberg and Tiffin University.

Contained in Gov. Strickland's budget proposal is an item that would reduce funding for the Ohio Student Choice Grant by about \$35 million. The Ohio Student Choice Grant offers \$900 in financial assistance to each Ohio resident seeking a bachelor's degree who attends an independent, nonprofit Ohio college or university full time. While seemingly a small amount, this grant money played a critical role in the financial aid packages for more than 58,000 students last year.

More than 1,400 students at Tiffin University and Heidelberg stand to lose about \$1.2 million in aid if the Ohio Student Choice Grant is eliminated.

The implications of the loss of these funds -- directly to Heidelberg and TU and in the state -- are staggering:

- * Because this aid can represent one-fourth to one-third of a student's out-of-pocket tuition, students who relied upon it may no longer be able to afford tuition, leading some students to drop out this fall.

- * Students who considered enrollment in one of Ohio's independent institutions may be forced to look elsewhere to surrounding states that offer more attractive aid packages.

- * Historically, when a student leaves a state for higher education opportunities, he/she is less likely to return after graduation.

- * These cuts will likely lead to "brain drain" for the state. Before the implementation of the Ohio Choice Grant in 1983, just 47 percent of Ohio's independent college students came from Ohio. That level is now 72 percent.

- * In order to maintain a strong economy and a highly skilled workforce, Ohio needs to keep college-educated workers, not drive them away.

- * Because independent colleges historically produce a disproportionate share of science and math majors, their loss could translate into a less technologically competitive state.

- * The cost to the taxpayers of Ohio will increase because the governor's proposal would result in an enrollment shift from the independent institutions of higher education to the state institutions in Ohio which are subsidized by the state budget at a much higher rate than the \$900 per year provided to students who attend independent colleges and universities. State financial support for public universities and community colleges subsidizes the cost of education for all Ohio students, regardless of financial need, who attend those state institutions.

We encourage you to contact our legislative representatives -- State Rep. Jeff Wagner, State Sen. Larry Mumper -- as well as Gov. Strickland's office and urge them to continue the Ohio Student Choice Grant program at its current funding level. Time is of the essence.

Thank you,

Dr. F. Dominic Dottavio, President, Heidelberg

Dr. Paul Marion, President, Tiffin University