



# PRESS RELEASE

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## **Advocates call on Speaker Cupp, Ohio House to support college students during pandemic and beyond**

Today, College Now Greater Cleveland, the Ohio Student Association and Policy Matters Ohio sent a letter to Ohio Speaker of the House Robert R. Cupp, urging him to support college students harmed by punitive debt-collection and transcript-withholding policies. The group called on speaker Cupp to hold hearings on legislation introduced this year that will help create a more supportive approach for students who owe money to colleges they attended.

Ohio's punitive approach to debt collection and transcript withholding keeps students from pursuing their educational goals, according to [Policy Matters analysis](#). It also undercuts Ohio's official goals to increase postsecondary completion and participation.

"In order to achieve Ohio's goal of 65% of our adult population having a college degree, certificate, or credential by 2025, our leaders need to make it easier for students to obtain their degrees," said Julie Szeltner, Senior Director of Adult Programs and Services at College Now.

The coalition urged lawmakers to pass two bills: House Bill 595, which would stop schools from using transcript issuance as a debt collection tool; and House Bill 597, which would halt the collection of all debt owed to state colleges and universities during the pandemic and freeze the accrual of interest and collection of fees on all outstanding debt owed.

Ohio law requires public colleges and universities to turn debt over to the state Attorney General's Office for collection. Students who cannot continue their education due to financial hardship, health problems or other emergencies often leave still owing money to the schools they attended. Because of state law, the AGO is responsible for accounts totaling more than \$735 million in over 390,000 accounts, many of which are tied to transcripts withheld by colleges and universities. What starts as a small debt can multiply many times over because of interest, fees and fines, leaving students unable to pay their debt and re-enroll in college.

"Students, especially students of color, are trying to make ends meet while continuing to pursue their education during the pandemic," said Prentiss Haney, Executive Director of the Ohio Student Association. "The last thing we want is to create more barriers for students who will contribute to rebuilding Ohio's economy."

Ohio's approach to debt collection especially harms students of color and those who attend part time, are the first in their families to attend college, come from low-income families, or are older than 24, according to [analysis by Policy Matters](#).

"These bills are a good starting point," said Piet van Lier, education researcher for Policy Matters. "But policymakers will need to do much more to create a more supportive, student-centered approach that strengthens our communities and our state by allowing more Ohioans to pursue their educational dreams."