



**Testimony of Brian Anderson, Council 4 AFSCME
Opposing HB 5332, AAC the Governor's Scholarship Program
Before the Higher Education & Employment Advancement
Committee, February 25, 2016**

Good afternoon Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis and members of the Higher Education Committee. My name is Brian Anderson. I am the chief legislative advocate for Council 4 AFSCME, a union representing 35,000 public and private sector employees, including dedicated professionals within the state higher education system.

I am submitting testimony in opposition to H.B. No. 5332, An Act Concerning the Governor's Scholarship Program. Our union, whose members work hard each day to support the state's efforts to increase educational attainment and prepare students for the high-tech workplace of tomorrow, opposes this bill for several reasons.

First, passage of the bill would eliminate the Need-Merit Award, taking money out of the hands of our neediest and brightest students. Loss of Need-Merit aid may very well result in these students attending out-of-state institutions. This bill would encourage, not alleviate, the state's notorious "brain drain" problem.

Second, the passage of the bill would destabilize the amount of aid each student is awarded by a given institution, so that two equally needy students may receive substantially disparate awards at the same institution. Equally deserving students deserve equal aid from the state.

Third, we oppose this bill because it eliminates the Academic Incentive Award, which provides additional need-based aid to those students who are on track to complete their degree in the required time. Taking a full course load has proven to be the most effective way for students to complete their degrees on time. These needy students, who have overcome so many obstacles to reach such a point, deserve our continued support to finish what they've started. These are the students who have demonstrated that they will make good on the state's investment and their efforts should be commended and rewarded with additional aid.

In closing, I think proposals like this are fundamentally flawed because they are aimed at inflicting pain on middle- and lower-class citizens as a substitute for fair economic policies that would ask the ultra-wealthy to sacrifice a little bit more to protect public higher education programs and other vital services that boost the economy.

The discussion should not revolve around bad proposals that aggravate the brain drain and hurt needy students. It should revolve around restoring taxes on the rich.

We strongly urge the committee members to oppose this bill, as it is both bad policy and unfair to our most promising needy students.

Thank you.