Written Testimony on Am. Sub. HB 49 to the Senate Finance Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee

Submitted by: Ann Brennan, Executive Director

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Thank you Chairman Hite, Vice Chairman Sykes, and members of the subcommittee for this opportunity to provide written testimony on Am. Sub. HB 49. I am Ann Brennan, and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio School Psychologists Association. Our association represents more than 900 school psychologists working in Ohio’s schools. School psychologists are highly trained in the multi-layered area of educational assessments, including: selecting which diagnostic assessments are best to use to determine a student’s academic level and progress, assisting school-based evaluation teams in interpreting assessment results, and using the data gleaned from assessments to both design interventions and monitor the progress students are making during the intervention period. School psychologists also have expertise in assessing school climate-related issues and designing school based behavioral health intervention plans for buildings, as well as for individual and groups of students.

Before focusing on a few of the many important education-related provisions in Am. Sub. HB 49, I would first like to express OSPA’s appreciation for the continued state funding of the school psychology intern program, included as a special education enhancement. This program is vital to the Ohio school psychology profession as it supports the ODE-approved school psychology training programs by funding the intern placements in school districts. We are again experiencing shortages of school psychologists in many parts of the state. The university training programs address these shortages by working in their geographic regions to determine where the unmet needs are, and then working with school districts to encourage them to become an approved intern site.

We would like to focus our comments on the following:

* ESC funding: OSPA supports increasing the ESC operating subsidy in the state budget (200500 line item) to the current funding level of $41.6 million. ESCs provide valuable services to school districts, especially in the areas of special education and gifted education. They do so under an efficient and effective service delivery system. OSPA also supports the

OESCA recommendation to maintain the ESC state subsidy as unrestricted aid.

* Special education preschool funding and staffing: OSPA supports the recommendation of OCECD to assure that special education preschool per-pupil funding fully funds both half-day and full-day preschool programs. OSPA opposes the House-passed amendment to increase the special education preschool student-to-teacher ratios from the current ratio of 1:6 to 1:8. Research supports the fact that smaller class size ratios for preschool students with disabilities result in better educational outcomes.
* Teacher externship requirement: OSPA supports the House-passed provision that eliminated this requirement. We agree this would be unduly burdensome for teachers and believe there are sufficient existing partnerships for sharing professional knowledge between the business and school community.
* Study of Special Education-Related Services Personnel Shortages: OSPA strongly supports the House-added provision that directs the Superintendent of Public Instruction to establish a workgroup on related services personnel shortages for the purpose of improving coordination of state, school and provider efforts to address the related services needs of students with disabilities. School psychologists are a related service provider and there is a serious shortage of school psychologists in many areas of the state. A concerted effort to address related service provider shortages is necessary to assure all students with disabilities have access to high-quality related service providers.

Thank you for considering our views.

Ann Brennan, Executive Director

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