



The Ohio School Counselor Association

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Proponent Testimony on HB 367
Nichole Miller and Michelle Grimm
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Chair Jones, Vice Chair Manchester, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Primary & Secondary Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to reiterate the Ohio School Counselor Association (OSCA)'s support for House Bill 367. My name is Nichole Miller, the Past President of OSCA, and next to me is Michelle Grimm, current OSCA President. I was here before you late last year to share our association's support for this bill previously.

Since that time, of course, the world has been ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many things have changed for schools and the education landscape in Ohio, making this bill all the more relevant and important. Testing waivers, changes in academic program standards and social isolation have made school counselors' role serving the social/emotional, academic and career development needs of students more critical than ever. Many OSCA members feel we're putting in more hours than ever before, trying to remain available to students as they face the negative consequences of social isolation and quarantining in homes that may be unsafe for them. Working remotely, it is hard to have our usual eye on these students to assess body language, voice inflection and other nonverbal cues that might indicate abuse. We know abuse and neglect reports to children protective services has decreased by almost 50% since the beginning of the "Stay at Home" period. Our concerns about this grow every day as remote learning continues.

In addition, school counselors are providing support to other school staff who are increasingly stressed about school closures. We continue to offer valuable input for 504 and IEP plans, collaborate with outside agencies serving our tier 3 students and play an integral part in serving the academic and career development needs of students. We are truly the one constant for students as we continue to serve the whole child.

And all this is occurring now in a virtual setting. We are scheduling weekly or daily digital check-ins and check-outs with students, creating virtual office hours and holding one-on-one or group counseling sessions via video conference. We have built digital College Credit Plus intent forms, set up google classrooms for accessing and submitting scholarships, and organized digital campus tours for college-bound students. Meanwhile, we continue to meet our usual obligations to prepare for academic awards nights and graduation, finalize year-end grades and build multiple master class schedules for the fall semester (online, hybrid and in-person schedules because we do not yet know what the upcoming school year will look like).

And yet, we are hearing that schools are considering getting rid of us. School counselors across the state are increasingly fearful about losing their jobs. Our role is not technically required, so we are usually the first ones to go when budget cuts hit. The Student Wellness and Success

Funds money, which could theoretically be used to support our services, is being directed toward budget gaps in the general fund now more than ever before. If school counselors are let go, gaping holes will be left in critical support services for students in need. We are the ones tying all the pieces of the educational support spectrum together – often the one trusted adult advocating for all students across every area of education.

Given these uniquely trying circumstances, we need HB 367 to become law so that school counselors can rely on having a job description that validates our need to focus our time on meaningful service in our three domain areas. We cannot be consumed by administrative and programmatic tasks in these challenging times. Our students deserve more. They need our expertise more than ever. School counselors are uniquely positioned to help students navigate various aspects of the COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 educational landscape. HB 367 will help move the needle for our profession in an important way, and ensure that we are spending as much time as possible engaging thoughtfully and one-on-one with students. In addition, the provision in the bill that creates a school counselor liaison within ODE will provide additional support for our profession by helping both us and ODE work more efficiently during this time.

Thank you very much for your indulgence as we explained in detail why our new normal during the COVID-19 pandemic necessitates the passage of HB 367 more than ever. OSCA would appreciate your favorable support for this bipartisan legislation. We are happy to answer any questions.