



# OhioGuidestone

SOLUTIONS FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES  
& COMMUNITIES

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## Senate Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education

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H.B. 166 Testimony

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I would like to thank Senator Terher and the members of the Senate Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the educational provisions of H.B. 166. My Name is Andy Cooper and I am the Vice President of Community Counseling for OhioGuidestone, a large behavioral health service agency headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio but with a footprint extending across the state. As part of our vast continuum of care, OhioGuidestone has been providing school-based services for more than 25 years. Currently we serve students in over 230 schools in 13 counties.

I am here today to emphasize the immense value and positive synergistic effect that school-based services afford our students, their families and the schools. Because intervening with the correct array of services and opportunities is key to our student's lifelong success, this is a needed investment with a record of positive outcomes. The continued partnership between the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) and the Ohio Department of Education serves to promote the wellness of our students and their families as well as to provide a comprehensive menu of supports for all students in these districts.

School-Based Services Providers work with children and adolescents from kindergarten through high school to provide a comprehensive range of clinical and support services. These services enable early identification of youth in need. All work with the child occurs within their environment including school, home and other community settings. School-based mental health providers utilize evidence-based and evidence-informed practices with the goal of building resiliency in the face of trauma and toxic stress. These services can include individual and family psychotherapy by licensed therapists, Therapeutic Behavioral Services (TBS), case management, consultation and prevention. On-site services allow providers the ability to consult with school professionals ensuring the student's ability to learn and thrive in the academic setting. Families are connected to the child's academic environment and are instrumental in the process. Together, mental-health providers, school personnel and families work as a team to enhance the student's social and emotional well-being, and success in school, in families and at home.

Existing and continued funding provides resources for schools to address a range of needs including suicide prevention, exposure to violence, stress, bullying awareness and substance abuse through the facilitation of student groups, professional development opportunities for teachers and school staff and parent support groups. The availability of on-site providers allows for timely in-

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house consultation for students at risk. The collaboration also allows for innovative ideas and the implementation of custom practices that are tailor-made to address individual school needs.

Few practices can have as much of an impact as school-based services. A wide range of therapeutic, social-emotional and educational needs can be met with original and comprehensive treatment approaches. Furthermore, these services are offered to our most economically disadvantaged students and school districts. As I have mentioned, perhaps the greatest advantage to this service is teamwork and the collaboration of all parties involved. Relationships and responsiveness are the key factors that provide timely, needed services to our school-aged children.

Our single greatest barrier is human resources. Recruitment and Retention of qualified providers is challenging. Competitive pay and office based worked often lures candidates to other jobs. We need to focus on our ability to attract a strong workforce by addressing compensation and benefits packages and fostering passion for this important work. The 2019 School-Based Behavioral Health Services Summary Report issued by the Ohio Counsel of Behavioral Health & Family Services Providers shows that roughly half of all Ohio Schools have access to School-Based Services. That means that half of our schools have access to diagnostic assessments, counseling, crisis services, evidenced-based programming, consultation, prevention and other therapeutic supports. It also means that half do not. By exploring creative compensation strategies and funding priorities, we can reach *all* of the schools. At OhioGuidestone alone we currently have demand for up to 10 more therapists while several new schools seek our services. Adjacent and rural counties are consistently requesting services. We know demand exceeds capacity, and we know that the service is impactful. As we move forward, we should recognize the undeniable impact that school-based services have on our communities as we address the needs of our most vulnerable populations.

I want to thank you again for this opportunity. As someone who has spent more 25 years providing these services and now leading a very large team, I can attest to the countless lives that have been positively impacted and the cost-effectiveness of such a collaborative endeavor.