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Senate Workforce & Higher Education Committee
November 30, 2022
Written Testimony on HB 509
Jennifer Murphy, School Psychologist

Chairman Johnson and Members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on HB 509.

My name is Jennifer Murphy, and I am an independently licensed school psychologist working in a private practice that I co-own in Northeast Ohio. At my practice, I specialize in conducting evaluations for learning disabilities. My partner, another independently licensed school psychologist, provides evidence-based literacy intervention and oversees highly-trained educators who also offer this same type of intervention within our practice.

I am writing you today about HB 509. I would like to focus my testimony on the possible alteration to the bill that would eliminate the independent school psychologist license. This would devastate my career, my small business, other independently licensed school psychologists, and our clients- children and young people with significant learning and mental health challenges.

I want to begin by clearly stating that the independent license afforded through the Ohio Board of Psychology is not duplicative of the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) license. The most notable difference between the two licenses is that the independent school psychology license allows me to work *independently* in a private practice setting without supervision, which is an essential component of working in private practice. It also allows me to diagnose learning and mental health disorders. This is similar to other professional licenses in our state, like those for speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and others who hold an independent professional license to work in private practice (and have the ability to submit insurance claims). For these reasons alone, the Board of Psychology and ODE licenses are fundamentally different. I would not be able to continue practicing as I currently do without an independent license.

However, we also see other benefits in having an independent license and working in private practice. These benefits allow us to reach Ohioans and support our profession in ways not often possible in a traditional school setting. I want to highlight just a few that have brought tremendous value to my professional life. Many other independent school psychologists have also experienced these benefits, which allow us to provide meaningful support to our students, their families, schools, and other professionals.

-I have been able to specialize and become highly trained in specific learning disabilities like dyslexia, which was not possible when I was a generalist working under all disability categories in the school setting.

-I have gone on to gain even higher levels of education and training since leaving public education, driven specifically by my wish to become highly competent in my professional niche. This level of education and training has allowed me to contribute to our profession beyond direct services to students. For example, I engage in research, provide professional development presentations at professional organizations, and teach courses at area universities. All of these contributions are possible because of the level of training and flexibility not typically attainable in a traditional public education setting.

-I greatly value the work of public educators and everything they do for our students. However, I can support student and parent rights differently in private practice. For example, I conduct Independent Educational Evaluations (IEEs), a right afforded to students and parents through federal and state special education law. Parents seeking IEEs frequently tell me that they struggle to find a professional specializing in identifying learning disabilities and literacy needs, or often have to wait many, many months to be seen at larger organizations. Additionally, my practice also supports Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship recipients by providing literacy intervention services. Again, there is a shortage of professionals providing these evidence-based services; many parents find it challenging to access these services provided by highly-trained professionals that accept the JP scholarship. In these ways, we directly support IDEA protections and offer families educational choice.

-Independent school psychologists who own private practices are small business owners. In many cases, they employ not only themselves but support staff and other mental health and education providers. Without an independent license, I would be unable to continue practicing in a private setting, and I would have to consider shuttering my practice, which my partner and I have spent years building.

-Perhaps most importantly, independent school psychologists help meet the needs of children and young people. In a time where we see a significant number of students with learning and mental health challenges, and considerable school psychologist shortages, private practitioners help students access much-needed services. We also help meet the needs of districts, charter schools, and private schools by contracting our services on a limited basis when their own employees cannot meet the high levels experienced in various school settings. I fear that eliminating the independent license, and therefore the ability to work independently in a private practice setting, will further exacerbate the shortage and put even greater stress on already overburdened systems and families.

Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony. I truly believe that independent school psychologists make a difference by providing high-quality, evidence-based services to our students and by supporting their families and other professionals throughout Ohio.

Eliminating the independent license would harm my career, my small business, and the students I proudly serve. At a time when we have unprecedented learning and mental health needs in our

state, it is hard to understand why we would choose to eliminate a career option for highly-trained professionals that help address these very challenges. I hope my testimony has clearly explained that the independent license is not duplicative of ODE's license, that professionals working under it provide great value to our students, their families, schools, and other professionals, and that eliminating the license would erase our livelihoods. Eradicating the independent license would devastate not only private practice school psychologists, but also the children and young people we serve with learning and mental health needs.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,
Dr. Jennifer Murphy
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