

Senate Workforce & Higher Education Committee
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Written Testimony on HB 509
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Chairman Johnson and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on HB 509.

I want to provide feedback regarding the well-intentioned but misguided changes to the school psychology licensure outlined in House Bill 509. The language added to the bill will result in school psychologists across the state no longer being able to practice privately. First, I want to stress the difference between the licensure obtained through the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Board of Psychology - the ODE license **ONLY** permits school psychologists to practice within the school setting. In contrast, the independent practice license obtained through the Psychology Board allows school psychologists across the state to open up small businesses and support students and families **OUTSIDE** the typical school day. This is an essential distinction between the two.

I want to provide statistics regarding the building in which I work - Hilliard Darby High School in Hilliard, Ohio. Within the five years I have worked there, we have seen a significant increase in the number of students receiving a diagnosis of anxiety and depression from medical professionals. We have seen a 72% increase in eligible students for accommodation plans under Section 504, averaging approximately 2-3 requests for plans from parents a week. In my building, we have myself (the school psychologist), four school counselors, and two social workers, and still, it is not enough mental health specialists to fully support the needs of our students during the school day. Not only that, when submitting outside referrals for counseling services for students, they often report waiting lists of up to a year to be seen. With the passing of this legislation, we will be limiting students and families even more to necessary services from experts in the field of education and psychology.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us many things - one of which is that we crave stability. In education, we continue to see the ramifications regarding student mental health, academic success, and ensuring students have appropriate skills to enter into their stage of life after high school. With the passing of this legislation as written, students and families would no longer be able to receive services from a private practice school psychologist, potentially causing that student to have to reestablish services with another clinician when the need for support is already at an all-time high. Moreover, private practice school psychologists would no longer be able to support school districts (already experiencing a significant shortage) by providing appropriate training and independent evaluations through their practice.

School psychologists are uniquely qualified by being well-versed in curriculum, assessment, special education law, and psychology (hence why school psychologists must work in a school setting for four years before applying for a license through the Ohio Board of Psychology); I do not think another branch of psychology is as qualified to speak to the level required to support students within the educational setting. Amid recession fears, the last thing this committee should be doing is risking the livelihood of school psychologists who have dedicated their work to supporting students and families across this beautiful state.

As a current Doctor of Education student, much of our instruction is focused on critical, ethical decision-making. From what I have learned thus far, while it may take longer to reach decisions by generating various inputs, ultimately, the decision casts a broader net to support

more individuals. Before voting on this language, I implore you to listen to experts in the field and those directly impacted.