



# Ohio School Counselor Association

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H.B. 352

Proponent Testimony

April 23, 2024

Chair Pavliga, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Brewer, and members of the House Behavioral Health Committee, thank you for allowing the Ohio School Counselor Association the opportunity to share our support for House Bill 352, legislation that would create the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study Committee to collect data on the impacts of those experiences and recommend strategies for addressing their harmful effects.

In our role as school counselors, we see the disruptive consequences ACEs wreak on student success and wellbeing almost every day. ACEs have been empirically linked to riskier behaviors, stunted academic achievement, mental health issues, substance abuse and suicide. These are all issues we try to help our students manage on a daily bases. We believe that additional dedicated resources, including the professionals' time and attention on this proposed study committee, are always helpful in better serving students challenged by these traumas. Concrete action items that we as a state can take to heart and fully fund would be valuable for our schools and communities as a whole. Thus, we strongly support the charge of this study committee in House Bill 352 and the action items that may come out of its work.

When this bill was introduced last General Assembly, OSCA supported a proposed amendment that would provide the option for a school counselor or social worker who has worked with children experiencing violence, abuse, and neglect to serve on the study committee. We are grateful to see this language included in the legislation this General Assembly. OSCA knows that the perspective school counselors bring as the primary staff managing the social/emotional needs of students in schools would be essential to a thorough and comprehensive report from the study committee. We are the first line of defense for students facing mental health needs and are usually the ones making the critical referrals to second line local agencies or professionals (psychologists, social workers, etc) when we encounter children with trauma. In fact, we find our members are increasingly doing more and more ACEs screenings, and some have adopted it as a standard practice for all new student enrollees. A policy brief from the Health Policy Institute of Ohio titled "[Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\): A strategic approach to prevent ACEs in Ohio](#)" lists "school-based social and emotional instruction," or SEL, as one of the 12 key strategies for preventing ACEs. SEL is a core component of school counselors' role in schools, so we would look forward to continuing to contribute best practices like SEL instruction that help our students manage the impacts of their abuse, neglect and trauma.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 352 and thank the committee for their time.