



**Senate Education Committee**  
**November 14, 2023**  
**Ohio School Counselor Association**  
**SB 168 – Interested Party Testimony**

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram and esteemed members of the Senate Education Committee: thank you for accepting the Ohio School Counselor Association's (OSCA's) written testimony regarding the provision of SB 168 impacting school counselors' education requirements.

Although OSCA does not have a position on SB 168 as a whole, we are concerned about lines 4088-4093, which apply the bill's minimum bachelor's degree education requirement for school staff to school counselors. At the outset, we want to say that we understand an amendment has been drafted to address these concerns, and we want to publicly thank the sponsor for her willingness to understand this issue and work with us to remove the relevant provision.

To further explain our concern: the uniform bachelor's requirement assumes that bachelor's degree education pathways exist for all school staff positions. That is not the case. In fact, a student today cannot earn a bachelor's in school counseling; that program is not offered at any accredited higher education institution in the country. The only school counseling degree that exists is at the master's level. Thus, a bachelor's prepared school counselor actually has no education in school counseling at all, but rather has earned an undergraduate degree in a field that may or may not actually be relevant to the role. By establishing a bachelor's degree minimum, notwithstanding the other requirements in rule, the Legislature is actually completely eliminating all relevant school counselor training in Code, which we know is not the intent. Because school counselors' education offerings are unique in this respect and this provision cannot practically be applied to school counselors, OSCA requests this provision be removed from the bill. This is the simplest fix, while leaving in place the current minimum master's degree and 700-hour internship requirement in rule.

To be clear, there is a reason why only master's programs exist for school counselor preparation. The school counselor role is a comprehensive, specialized position covering three different domain areas: academic development, career development and mental health. Only an advanced graduate degree can effectively cover the knowledge necessary to develop an expertise in all three of these areas, which encompass both the education space and mental health space. A school counselor's role essentially ties all of the services offered by other school staff together for a student. There are also extensive ethical considerations involved in counseling students that require additional focus. Many of our members currently in education programs have reported

that they didn't think they needed their master's degree until they began taking courses and discovered how complex the work is and how many legal and ethical considerations it involves. So, even if a bachelor's degree in school counseling existed, OSCA believes it would not be sufficient to prepare a counselor for the level of service our students deserve, especially now. Not only would changing this requirement put Ohio out of step with the rest of the country, but it would be reducing training at a time when the needs of students are greater than ever. Fortunately, master's degrees in school counseling are offered at almost every public university in Ohio, and can even be completed entirely online. We do not see this degree as a barrier to entry.

Finally, we understand the intent of this provision is to address staff workforce shortages, which are very real. However, specifically for school counselors, the root cause of the lack of staff is not a pipeline problem, it's a burnout problem. School counselors for years have been asked to take on far more than is encompassed within their three domain areas: endless testing coordination and proctoring, 504 paperwork, College Credit Plus management and administrative tasks, and lunch duty. In addition, they are facing caseloads of 400 students per individual counselor on average across the state, which causes them to provide more reactionary services instead of the preventative supports that are most effective. Unfortunately, two of our OSCA Board members have actually left the profession in the last couple of years due to burnout impacting their physical and mental health. So yes, an administrator may not be able to find a school counselor willing to fill a position with a 800:1 student-to-school counselor ratio, or a position that covers two whole school buildings at once. Addressing these stressors, and ultimately working towards a 250:1 ratio across every student age group, will keep more school counselors in their current jobs, while attracting more school counselors into the role.

Again, we would like to acknowledge the productive conversations we have had with the sponsor on this issue and look forward to continuing to work with her and the rest of the committee on adoption of the needed amendment.

Thank you for considering OSCA's perspective. Should you have any questions, please reach out to Julia Wynn, OSCA Lobbyist, at [julia@gov-advantage.com](mailto:julia@gov-advantage.com).