

Written Interested Party Testimony on SB 83
Senate Workforce & Higher Education Committee
Patrick Frato, Cleveland State University School Psychology Program Director

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli and Ranking Member Ingram, thank you for allowing me to provide written testimony on SB 83. My name is Patrick Frato and I am the Director of the School Psychology Program at Cleveland State University. I am also our program's Internship Coordinator, tasked with ensuring all graduates are proficient in the skills necessary for independent service delivery. Although I have concerns with most aspects of S.B. 83, I will focus on the provision that most impacts the effectiveness of our graduates: requirements for diversity coursework. I appreciate the sub bill's change to this language to allow for programs with accreditation or licensure requirements to continue to require diversity courses.

Lower Test Scores

School Psychologists are responsible for administering a variety of assessments that help determine special education eligibility. In order to obtain accurate results, test administrators must establish positive relationships (build rapport) with students; examinees who are comfortable and motivated are more likely to perform optimally. It has been my observation that diversity training is an essential component to learning to form strong connections with children (and families) from different backgrounds. *Before receiving this training, our students simply do not know how to speak to or act around people who are different than them.* Consequences of school psychologists who don't or can't build sufficient rapport include lower test scores; false positives for special education eligibility; increased district, state, and federal special education costs; and non-disabled children placed in classes for children with disabilities.

Increase in Mediations and Due Process

Multicultural training can help minimize conflicts between school psychologists and parents of students with disabilities. Positive relationships with parents and families are essential to avoiding conflicts that can result in mediation and due process. Parents who believe school psychologists are biased against them - due to race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or background - and/or who have negative interpersonal experiences with school psychologists, are more likely to feel that schools do not have their children's best interests in mind; and may formally challenge special education placements and decisions. With diversity training, school psychologists can reduce time-intensive, resource draining, financially burdensome conflicts.

Higher Risk of School Violence

Research has consistently indicated that the quality of relationships between students and school staff likely plays a significant role in preventing school violence. School psychology training programs, including ours, teach that every child must have at least one close, positive relationship with a school staff member. This strategy serves two primary purposes: 1) It increases awareness of potential acts of school violence and 2) It helps prevent them by providing at-risk students with positive adult connection and guidance. Further, promoting trusting student-adult relationships is essential to students feeling safe and empowered to report potentially dangerous activity (including threats of violence and suicide). Such reporting is one of the most effective school safety strategies. As mentioned, establishing strong relationships with students from diverse backgrounds requires multicultural training.

Absent removal from the bill, I ask that you please maintain the sub bill language in this legislation related to DEI coursework because of the devastating effects that could result from school psychologists who are not able to effectively establish relationships and work with diverse groups of people.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick Frato". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "P" and "F".

Patrick Frato, Ed.S., NCSP, SP 597
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