

Testimony – Budget
House Finance Committee Hearing
March 5th, 2025
Presented by Cara Dillon

Chairman Stewart, Vice Chairman Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeny, I am Dr. Cara Dillon, and I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts with the committee about the budget at this important stage of the legislative process. I am a school psychology faculty in Ohio, and I am concerned about the pay for school psychology interns. I have wonderful students that are passionate about the field, and I hope to continually support them as they serve Ohio children. The stability of the internship program for school psychology is an attractive opportunity for many in Ohio and outside who wish to enter into our field. Our interns are grateful for the funding that is available to them. However, I hope to advocate for their improved salary to better compensate them for their service to the children of the state.

To gain more insight into the financial concerns of our interns, I surveyed the current interns and alumni that received an Ohio internship. I had 27 interns and 94 alumni respond. The questions were simple. Did you take out student loans during internship and how much? Did you take on credit card debt during internship and how much? Around 67% reported that they took out student loans for their internship year. Of those that reported how much they took out in loans, over half took out loans of \$10,000 or more. There was no option beyond \$10,000, so this likely does not truly capture the level of student loans taken out. Additionally, 47% of interns and alumni reported that they accrued credit card debt during internship, and 50% had \$1,000 to \$2,999 in debt though 38% took on more. Overall, 46% of the interns and alumni that responded took on one type of debt and 32% took on both which means that 78% are leaving their internship saddled with some kind of debt.

This is leading to real impacts on school psychology students. There are two awards given every year between the around 100 interns for being outstanding students and outstanding future school psychologists. Recently, one of these awardees had to drop out because they simply could not take on the financial toll of housing during the internship year. Some students are declining to stay in the state for the internship year and opt to find a better paid internship out of state. Even some districts that previously hosted our interns no longer can. Minimum teacher salaries set by unions also include our interns, and several districts have now declined interns because the pay is too low to allow.

With the rising cost of housing, I worry more and more students will not be able to afford to live in the places they are serving. The average cost of rent in Ohio is \$1036 for a one bedroom apartment, and average rent is higher in major cities where most of our interns will serve. Our students will spend, based on the Ohio average, over \$12,400 a year on rent alone which is over a third of the current salary allowance. Affordable housing, considered to be no more than 30% of income by the United States Department for Housing and Urban Development (2011), for these interns would be around \$750 with the current salary allowance.

Knowing that there remains a shortage of school psychologists in Ohio and nationwide (National Association of School Psychologists, n.d.), we want to ensure that our school psychology students have the resources to remain in Ohio. In order to do so, we must ensure that school psychology students can have their needs met for housing and that we continue to have school district placements for these students. Please consider raising the budget allowance for these dedicated school psychology students so that they can serve Ohio children and make ends meet. We appreciate the opportunity the internship funding provides, and we hope for further investment into the program.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this information,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cara L. Dillon". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Cara Dillon, PhD, NCSP, BCBA

National Association of School Psychologists (n.d.) State shortages dashboard.

National Association of School Psychologists.

<https://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/state-shortages-data-dashboard>

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2011). Glossary of terms to affordable housing. *Archives. Retrieved from:*

<https://archives.hud.gov/local/nv/goodstories/2006-04-06glos.cfm#:~:text=Affordable%20Housing:%20Affordable%20housing%20is,Reference:%20www.hud.gov>