

March 11, 2025

Representative Brian Stewart
Chairman – Ohio House Finance Committee
Statehouse
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Representative Stewart,

I am writing you today with regard to key portions of House Bill 96, particularly that portion which funds the School Psychology Internship program. I am respectfully asking you and the Finance Committee to support a funding request of \$4.3 million per fiscal year. This would enable each of our 108 School Psychology Interns statewide to receive a salary of \$35,000 each with a small remainder that would fund a portion of their employer's contribution to the State Teachers Retirement System (STRS).

I am writing to you in my capacity as the Chair of the Ohio Supervisors of School Psychologists, a former President of the Ohio School Psychologists Association, a former elected Ohio Delegate to the National Association of School Psychologists, an Adjunct Professor in school psychology for nearly 25 years, and a School Psychologist licensed by the State Board of Psychology since 2001 who has been engaged in independent practice since that time. Over the past 25 years, I have been involved in the supervision of approximately 80 School Psychology Interns in the Akron Public Schools, and I have trained thousands of them at statewide conferences.

There is a critical shortage of school psychologists in every state in our country, and the State of Ohio is no exception. Every year, supervisors in school settings struggle to fill a number of open positions in various school districts that exceed the number of licensed practitioners available to assume these positions. This critical shortage is only addressed through the recruitment, training, support, and retention of high-quality School Psychology Interns.

School Psychology Interns typically enter their position having just completed a four-year undergraduate degree, followed by 2-3 years of graduate school in order to qualify for their internship program. After 6-7 years of college education, their student loan debts are often well into the tens of thousands of dollars. As the School Psychology Internship is a particularly demanding year with long hours and myriad training/work responsibilities, opportunities for pursuing supplemental income are contraindicated when our interns should spend their internship school year focusing on their responsibilities and preparing for the transition to full-time professional practice. Our funding recommendation would support our School Psychology Interns maintain a base standard of living as they complete their training. *School Psychology Interns sacrifice, on average, 7 years of their lives in their studies to prepare for entry into the field; this funding request honors that sacrifice.*

This year, many of our graduate training programs were told certain districts cannot host any School Psychology Interns because their school district requires the state minimum teacher salary be provided. This was despite the outstanding qualification and professionalism of the candidate interns and the school district's desperate needs for their services. (Here I should note that nearly all interns begin providing school psychological services directly to students within their first 1-2 months in their school

district, and they do so at a substantially reduced cost to schools.) These fiscal barriers serve as a detriment to districts with vacant positions. In my own school district, the Akron Public Schools, we typically hire about half of our School Psychology Interns each year. They constitute a majority of the full-time practitioners on my staff. Our newest training program, The University of Findlay, saw seven of their nine interns land jobs at their placement sites last year. The requirements of many districts to employ School Psychology Interns at a state teacher minimum salary will close placement opportunities and frustrate/limit successful entry into a workforce that is already critically understaffed.

A recent graduate of the University of Dayton, and former trainee of mine, shared that she worked two or three jobs throughout graduate school, received financial support from her parents, and still struggled to pay rent during the internship year even in a relatively low cost-of-living city. Cleveland State University has shared that all of the School Psychology Interns are working additional jobs, and The Ohio State University reports that all their students have taken out loans to support them during the internship year.

Investment in our School Psychology Interns is an investment in Ohio's schoolchildren. Several university training programs have also had their interns lead a variety of "Change Projects" in school districts across Ohio. These projects involve our interns investigating an area of local need and then implementing innovative programs to address those needs. Recent programs have included early literacy, social-emotional learning, mental health intervention, technological applications in the learning environment, and dropout prevention. These Change Projects create something of value that will continue in the district, even if the School Psychology Intern departs at the end of the internship.

Finally, and by way of context, I will note here that I am a conservative Republican who has held elective office on the Summit County Republican Executive Committee for several terms up to the present day. As such, as a general rule, I am broadly supportive of various efforts to reduce wasteful, superfluous, and/or redundant government spending. I am strongly motivated to streamline government functioning and preserve taxpayer dollars whenever it is practical to do so. It is in this context that I am respectfully imploring you and your Committee to allocate this critical funding.

Thank you for your service to the State of Ohio and thank you for your consideration of this testimony.

Respectfully,

Dr. Robert J. Kubick, Jr.

Licensed School Psychologist – State Board of Psychology (SP.527)
Chair – Ohio Supervisors of School Psychologists
Past President – Ohio School Psychologists Association

Ohio School Psychology Internship Program Historical Information

The Ohio School Psychology Internship Program was jointly developed by the Ohio School Psychologists Association (OSPA), the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (ODEW), the Ohio university training programs 60 years ago for the purpose of placing highly trained Ohio school psychologists in Ohio's public school districts. It began as a unit-funded type program with ODEW administering the funds to school districts based on the number of intern school psychologists placed in approved intern site locations (school districts). Over various school funding formula changes, it has evolved into a special education enhancement line item and has been flat funded for several biennium budgets. The line item funds interns in their third and final year of training when they are placed in a school setting for that approved, structured and supervised training year. The funding goes to the school district to pay the interns a salary stipend based on the teacher salary schedule.

The Interuniversity Council of School Psychology Training programs (9 approved Ohio programs), in collaboration with OSPA and ODEW, has developed the Ohio Internship in School Psychology Manual (guidance document) with uniform training and supervision requirements across all approved training programs, as well as a thorough intern program evaluation report, which includes specific student outcome data. The program has allowed the universities and OSPA to work with ODE on the goals of placing highly trained school psychologists in hard to staff schools, those that are experiencing shortages of available school psychologists. This unfortunately is occurring more acutely in recent school years and the universities have made a commitment to recruit more students than they have in the past, so they may better account for attrition rates (students not graduating from the programs). The goal is to have at least 100 interns graduate every year.

School psychologists are essential members of school teams in a variety of areas focused on improving academic achievement, promoting positive behavior and mental health, creating safe climates, and strengthening community-family-school partnerships. Specifically, school psychologists are highly trained in the multi-layered area of educational assessments, including: selecting which diagnostic assessments are best to use to determine a student's academic level and progress, assisting school-based evaluation teams in interpreting assessment results, and using the data gleaned from assessments to both design interventions and monitor the progress students are making during the intervention period. School psychologists also serve on evaluation teams responsible for evaluating students referred to them with a suspected disability, as well as assisting in the development of IEP's. Additionally, they are highly trained in the mental health arena; they frequently serve students and districts in the design and implementation of positive behavioral supports and behavioral interventions. They also serve on school crisis teams responsible for developing plans and delivering mental health services under the most difficult of circumstances. The school psychology intern program is the foundational year of training that prepares future school psychologists to master these competencies. Outcomes of this training approach have demonstrated a net positive benefit to children and families in Ohio.

The state funding of the intern program assures there will be sufficient numbers of highly trained future school psychologists to serve students and districts. Without the continued state funding we would lose this long history of collaboration between ODE and the university training programs, as there would be no incentive to continue to work together to produce the best school psychology training, which Ohio is well known to provide.