

## **Courtney Bockbrader & Lauren Davis, School Psychology Interns**

My name is Courtney Bockbrader and I am Lauren Davis. We are both school psychologist interns from the University of Dayton serving public schools in Central Ohio. We speak before you to advocate for increasing the funding from the state of Ohio for school psychology interns. School psychology interns provide valuable knowledge, skill, and expertise to the schools we work in. As interns we work full-time in public school districts, often taking on an independent caseload for special education evaluations, mental health counseling, crisis intervention, and intervention consultation. The internship funding from the state of Ohio is vital to continue to support school psychology interns across our state.

As interns ourselves, we recognize the importance of this funding. Many members of our cohort have expressed that they would not have been able to pursue this profession without access to the internship grant. While the internship grant has allowed many of us to pursue this career field, it has not always been easy. Several members of our cohort were teachers for years before pursuing a career in school psychology. This means that they took pay cuts of over 30,000 dollars during their internship year. One of these cohort members is a mother of two who would not have been able to pursue this career without support from their spouse. Additionally, it is common for interns to go without paid health insurance. Many districts in Ohio will not offer interns healthcare benefits despite the work they do for the district. This out of pocket expense should be accounted for when determining the grant budget.

Even for those of us like myself, who have pursued this career straight out of college and are able to stay on their parent's health insurance, the internship pay is not enough to provide financial stability. I personally rely on my partner's support to be able to afford bills and basic necessities each month. In addition, it is important to note that we continue to pay tuition during internship year, which for me would amount to over half of my salary for the year if I were to attempt to pay for that out of pocket without borrowing money.

As someone with research interests in school psychology recruitment and retention, I have seen firsthand the importance of Ohio's internship grant. Currently, there is a serious shortage of individuals entering the field of school psychology, with cost being a substantial recruitment barrier. I conducted research with 110 high school students from Central Ohio, and nearly two thirds indicated that the cost of college was the most significant barrier when considering careers that require college degrees. It is crucial for high school and undergraduate students to perceive a degree in school psychology as financially obtainable. This must start with the increase of the internship grant. Additional funding would significantly reduce this perceived barrier and help reduce the shortage within this field.

School psychology interns provide more than enough value, support, and knowledge to school districts to be deserving of, at a minimum, the salary that entry-level teachers are given. We enter our internship year with a master's degree in education, and we are seeking fair compensation that aligns with the level of education we have attained. Increasing the internship salary for school psychologists is vital if we want to continue to recruit a diverse range of

practitioners to enter this already under-represented career field, whether they are coming straight from undergraduate programs or making a career change after gaining experience as a teacher. We deserve to be paid in a way that represents the value that we bring to our work each day.

Thank you for allowing us to testify today on behalf of our school psychology program at the University of Dayton. We hope that you will consider increasing the internship salary to fairly compensate school psychology interns across our state.