

House Finance Committee

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HB 96, State Operating Budget

Patrick Frato, Senior College Lecturer

Chairwoman Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 96. I am Patrick Frato, Senior College Lecturer at Cleveland State University, Director of the School Psychology Program, and President of the Inter-University Council for Ohio School Psychology, residing and working in Independence, Ohio, and I am here to address critical issues concerning the profession of school psychology.

As a practicing school psychologist and school psychology trainer with 20 years of experience in Ohio and other educational systems, I have witnessed firsthand the invaluable contributions of school psychology interns to our schools and communities. These interns play a pivotal role in supporting students' mental health, academic achievement, and overall well-being. However, the current stipend for these interns, approximately \$25,000 before taxes, has remained stagnant since my own internship during the 2004-2005 school year, two decades ago.

To contextualize this stagnation, consider the impact of inflation over the past 20 years. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index, \$25,000 in 2005 is equivalent to approximately \$41,000 in 2025 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.). This calculation underscores that the current stipend falls significantly short of maintaining the purchasing power it once held.

This financial shortfall has tangible consequences. Many of our promising school psychology students are now seeking internships out of state, particularly in Michigan, where stipends, according to my students who are currently competing for these positions, range between \$40,000 and \$50,000 per year. This trend threatens to exacerbate the existing shortage of school psychologists in Ohio, a shortage that many school districts are already grappling with.

Furthermore, union contracts in several Ohio districts mandate that all educators receive a minimum state teacher salary. Due to insufficient grant funding to meet these contractual obligations, some districts are no longer able to accept school psychology interns. This not only limits the training opportunities within our state but also hampers our ability to cultivate a robust pipeline of qualified professionals to serve our students.

Ohio has long been recognized for its strong network of school psychologists who uphold a high level of professionalism and deliver exceptional services to children and families. This success is largely attributed to our state's commitment to training and retaining top talent. To continue this legacy and address the current challenges, it is imperative that we increase the internship stipend

to align with the Ohio minimum teacher salary of \$35,000. This adjustment would not only restore the stipend's original value when accounting for inflation but also make our state more competitive in attracting and retaining future school psychologists.

Investing in our school psychology interns is an investment in the mental health and academic success of our students. By providing a fair and competitive stipend, we can ensure that Ohio remains a leader in delivering quality educational support services.

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to answer any questions or provide additional information.

Reference:

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (n.d.). *CPI inflation calculator*. U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm