

Senate Finance Committee

May 14th, 2025

HB 96, State Operating Budget

Dr. Cara Dillon, Assistant Professor of School Psychology

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing and Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 96. I am Dr. Cara Dillon, and I am an Assistant Professor of School Psychology. I am here to testify on issues related specifically to the profession of school psychology, and I thank you for this opportunity to share with you all a need for our state. School psychologists serve students in our state through special education evaluations, consultation with parents and teachers, mental health services, screening for academic and behavior needs, prevention services and more. Ohio, like many other states, faces a significant shortage of school psychologists. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) sets the standard for school psychologist to student ratios at 1:500, and Ohio sits at 1:815 (NASP, n.d.).

In order to improve the workforce, Ohio has a paid internship program for school psychology students that has helped us recruit and retain students. Historically, this program ensured our graduate programs could compete with states near us for high quality students. During this internship year, our students will collectively serve thousands of Ohio children. Students participating in this internship program commit to working as a school psychologist in Ohio for at least one year post-graduation, and data suggests these new professionals tend to remain in the state. However, without funding increases over the past several years, a challenge has emerged.

Currently, the school psychology internships pay about \$30,000 per intern before the state teachers retirement system, taxes, and health insurance. I asked my students about take home pay, and they receive around \$20,000 after those deductions. This is simply not enough to live. Average rent in Ohio for a 1 bedroom apartment is \$12,432 a year meaning that our students spend over half of their income on housing during their internship year. Average yearly groceries cost \$4080 and yearly utilities cost \$5664 in Ohio. This leaves our students at -\$2,312 for the year. This does not account for car payments, gas, child care, or any emergencies. I surveyed our current interns and alumni about the debt they accrue during internship year. Of the over 130 that responded, 67% took out student loan debt and 47% took on credit card debt. For student loan debt, over half took out \$10,000 or more. For credit card debt, half accrued

\$1,000 to \$2,999 of debt. 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 as they serve Ohio's children.

This is causing real strain. Students have decided to take higher paying internships out of state, and there was one case of a student returning an award because they could not take on the rest of the burden of internship year. Increasing the line item for the internship program would help us keep the precious few school psychologist students that we have.

In Ohio, we need about 1,200 more school psychologists to meet those NASP standards. We have around 95 interns graduate every year. Although it is hard to pin down how many school psychologists leave the profession every year, there is some data on the subject. Around 5-8% will leave the field each year by leaving the profession or retiring (Castillo et al., 2014; Curtis et al., 2004; Morrison et al., 2022). With 1,800 school psychologists in Ohio (United State Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023), that is around 90-144 school psychologists leaving the field yearly. Based on the lowest number in that range, we are net 5 school psychologists to address the shortage. It is clear we do not have much room to lose interns to other states if we wish to address the shortage. Further, without funding the internship program more, school psychology programs have little room to expand to better meet the shortage. If we increase school psychology interns by just 5 students, each would be paid \$3,000 less which is around 10%.

An increase in funding would also allow our programs to recruit and retain students to address the shortage of school psychologists in the state to better benefit Ohio's children.

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

References

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Curtis, M. J., Grier, J. E. C., & Hunley, S. A. (2004). The changing face of school psychology: Trends in data and projections for the future. *School Psychology Review*, 33(1), 49-66.

National Association of School Psychologists (n.d.) State shortages dashboard. *National Association of School Psychologists*.
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United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023). *Occupational employment and wages, May 2023: 19-3034 school psychologists*. Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics <https://www.bls.gov/oes/2023/may/oes193034.htm>

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY INTERNSHIP PAY

THE SALARY

School psychology internships are paid from a pool provided by a line item in the budget. Intern pay is around \$30,000, and \$20,000 after taxes, STRS, and health insurance.

\$20,000



\$7,432

RENT

Average rent in Ohio is \$1,036 a month (more in major cities) and \$12,432 a year.

UTILITIES

Average utilities in Ohio are \$472 a month and \$5664 a year.



\$1,768



\$-2,312

GROCERIES

The monthly grocery bill of an average Ohioan is \$340 a month and \$4080 a year.

WHAT'S MISSING

This leaves no room for a car payment, gas, childcare, or any emergency needs. Over 78% of surveyed interns and alumni have student loan or credit card debt from internship.

**78%
Have
Debt**