

Senate Workforce & Higher Education Committee
Nov. 30, 2022
Written Testimony on HB 509
[Kara Bradford]

Chairman Johnson and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on HB 509.

I am writing with an urgent plea to reconsider the modification being proposed to HB 509 regarding private practice licensure for school psychologists. I am a dually licensed school psychologist working in Stark and Cuyahoga Counties. I am licensed both by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) and the Ohio Board of Psychology. With my ODE license, I am able to service public and private school districts with desperately needed psychological and mental health services. With Board licensure, I am able to work in private practice and serve the greater community through medical insurance and private pay. I am unable to provide the latter services without the Board license. There is a severe shortage of school psychologists, and just general clinicians trained in neuropsychological testing and diagnosis, across the nation. Ohio school psychologists are uniquely privileged to service our communities through the private practice setting as well as the public school setting.

I worked in Canton Local Schools in Canton, Ohio for the last 5 years. To say there was and is a severe mental health crisis would be an understatement. The education system in Ohio is very clearly struggling. Staff are being given more and more unmanageable responsibilities every hour of every day. One school-based school psychologist in Canton Local Schools is responsible for roughly 1100 students. It is next to impossible to service the number of special education students and maintain all assigned job duties. For example, just one school day can include all of the following: triage hourly crises, classroom observations, running small group interventions, meeting with students during their lunch period, making reports to Child Protective Services, running interventions with individual students, conducting an academic and/or cognitive assessment, report writing, consulting with teachers on students with severe behavioral issues in their classroom, and so, so much more. (Please notice I did not include "eating lunch" because most days, there just isn't time between the items on the overwhelming and never-ending list of responsibilities.) The buildings I worked in each had two school counselors and two clinical mental health support staff. We were all physically and mentally exhausted at the end of every single day. This past August I switched to a school psychologist position in a private practice. The private practice setting allows evaluations and therapy to occur uninterrupted so students and providers can give their undivided attention to the goals of the session. It lessens the daily load on school-based school psychologists so they are able to focus on triaging crises, reinforcing social/emotional/behavioral skills in the appropriate environment, connecting families to school staff and community resources, and more. School-based school psychologists and private practice based school psychologists must work together if we want to get any sort of handle on the current mental health crisis of our young people.

Senator Johnson, if you support this bill to eliminate the private practice licensure for school psychologists, you will further deprive our Ohio citizens of much needed services related to diagnosis and treatment of developmental disorders in children. Our practice's waiting list is pages long full of clients seeking my school psychological evaluation services because they cannot access these supports through their public schools. A private practice license is ESSENTIAL to our communities. Without it, mental and educational support will decrease during a time when we need them most.

Thank you for your time,
Kara Bradford