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Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 2153. I am an Associate Professor in the Teachers College at Emporia State University, and direct the School Psychology Program. I served last year as President of the Kansas Association of School Psychologists, which supports this bill.

I would first like to offer some brief facts about the changing role of school psychologists. In past decades, the majority of school psychologist time had been spent in assessment of children for special education. Now, school psychologists work with all students, regardless of ability or disability, primarily working proactively to prevent academic and mental health problems.

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009) currently estimate employment of psychologists in all fields to grow 15 percent from 2006 to 2016, much faster than average for other occupations. They identify the increased demand for psychological services in schools as a key cause for this growth. They state that “Growing awareness of how students’ mental health and behavioral problems...affect learning will increase demand for school psychologists to offer student counseling and mental health services.”
- Today’s school psychologists are recognized as mental health professionals in the healthcare system. This is particularly so with research well demonstrating the profound impact of mental health and social/emotional development on a learner’s ability to benefit from educational services.
- The U.S. Surgeon General’s *Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999) and the report from the President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health (2003) are two recent federal documents that focused attention on the critical importance of school-based mental health services in improving the emotional well being of children.
  - According to these reports, more than 80% of youth with mental disorders receive no specialty intervention for their emotional and behavioral problems at all.
  - Of the 20% who do, about 70% see a mental health professional in the schools.
  - For nearly half of those children, the schools are the sole provider.
- This highlights that there are 1) tremendous unmet mental health needs among children in the United States, and that 2) schools are currently the primary providers of mental health services for children.

This relates to other facts I would like to share with you, which regards the extent of training needed to become a licensed school psychologist.

- In 1969, 93% of practicing school psychologists had Master’s (M.S.) degrees.

- By 1990, the Education Specialist (Ed.S.) became the minimal degree needed to enter the profession.
- By 2000, 41% hold an M.S., 28% an Ed.S., and 30% a Ph.D (doctorate).
  - To put the preparation via the Ed.S. degree in context, it can help to compare it to building administrator credentialing.
  - To earn an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership requires 60 credit hours at the University of Kansas and virtually all other universities.
  - To earn an Ed.S. degree in my program at Emporia State University requires 73 credit hours, a full-time three-year commitment.
  - Those who pursue a doctorate in school psychology require 136 credit hours (cf. University of Kansas), a commitment that averages 4-5 years of full-time study and well exceeds by double the graduate training needed to earn a doctorate in educational administration.

For well over ten years, there have been warnings about increasing shortages of school psychologists in the United States, which primarily have to do with three factors. In part it has to do with increasing needs for school-based mental health services, in part on the increasing training requirements for school psychologists, and finally has to do with graying of the profession. I would like to briefly review some of those facts.

- The Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Act, reports on all school psychologists employed in public schools. That most recent report (2002) indicates that there are 26,266 school psychology positions in public schools. As of January 2009, 9,800 of those school psychologists have attained board certification.
- Studies (Curtis et al, 2004) have projected personnel needs based on estimates of new school psychologists entering the field from training programs, as well as those exiting through retirement and attrition. Personnel attrition due to retirement rates continues to exceed the supply of new university graduates eligible for employment (NASP, 2006).
  - (Curtis, 2004) In 1980, the mean age of school psychologists was 38, and but that mean now approaches 50.
  - More than 50% of currently practicing school psychologists are predicted to retire by 2015, and 2 out to 3 by 2020 (Curtis, Grier, and Hunley, 2004).
  - Based on a state by state analysis, 27 states will experience a retirement rate of higher than 50% by 2012.
  - On average, approximately 1750 new school psychologists enter the field each year (Curtis, 2004).
  - In accounting for school populations nationwide compared to school psychology personnel, there has been an 11% decrease in the number of school psychologists available per pupil between 1999-2005 (Charvat, 2005). By 2015, the excess retirement rate will be an additional 2.9 percent per year.
  - At present, there is a nation-wide shortage of almost 9,000 school psychologists, and expected to be 15,000 by 2020.

The two most ready remedies for personnel shortages are to recruit more students into training programs, and to enact policies which help retain existing personnel. NCSP parity addresses both. Here is what it will accomplish:

- Promote the employment of highly qualified personnel. Salary stipends demonstrate that a state recognizes and acknowledges the importance of hiring school psychologists who meet contemporary, nationally recognized standards for training and supervision.
- Ensure that the highest quality of services can be provided to students and families to make sure that the learning environment is the most conducive to individual success
- Salary stipends promote higher levels of knowledge and competency as NCSP school psychologists must engage in ongoing and meaningful continuing professional development to maintain their certification.
- Salary stipends for board-certified school psychologists help in recruitment and retention of more highly qualified personnel at a time when a national shortage of school psychologists is being experienced and great competition exists for qualified personnel across states. Most recent data (Curtis et al, 2007) shows mean salaries of school psychologists nationally to be \$62,513. Our census region reports an average salary of \$50,920, which ranks Kansas toward the bottom (7th out of 9<sup>th</sup>).
- It will allow the state of Kansas to act proactively to hold our ratio of school psychologists to pupils at an acceptable level.
  - In neighboring states of Missouri (161 school psychologists, ratio 5735:1) and Oklahoma (192 school psychologists, 3249:1), students have little access to school psychology services. Finally addressing the problem, Oklahoma passed an NCSP parity bill last year, paying \$5000 stipends to school psychologists in order to address their shortages.
    - Other states to do so in recent years are Louisiana, Nevada, and Delaware.
    - An NCSP parity bill for \$2,000 stipends is currently being heard by the Indiana legislature.

I appreciate the opportunity to be heard today. The attached reference list provides sources for the above statements.

Jim Persinger

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