Aloha Friends and Colleagues,

The Hawai`i Association of School Psychologists (HASP) recognizes the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused here in Hawai`i, and we are committed to helping our community. School psychologists are uniquely qualified to support the well-being of our keiki as they navigate this crisis. School psychologists are trained to identify trauma, assess risk, respond to crises, and promote mental health. They partner with families, teachers, and other professionals to create safe and supportive learning environments that strengthen connections between home, school, and the community. HASP knows that Hawai`i’s school psychologists are more eager than ever to contribute their skills. At the same time, we have concerns regarding the lack of credentialing for school psychologists in Hawai`i, as this could adversely affect their ability to provide ethical services. HASP knows this concern can be solved in a timely manner. We will volunteer to implement a credentialing process as quickly as possible, so that school psychologists can ethically provide services to help our keiki in need during this crisis.

HASP believes that credentialing is important for all professionals that are entrusted to care for students, especially those in crisis or with special needs. We have been working to establish credentialing requirements for Hawai`i’s school psychologists since 2011. Currently, school psychologists have no state credential and are exempt from licensure requirements when carrying out the functions of the Department of Education (DOE; HRS 465). Hawai`i is the only state in the nation that does not credential school psychologists. This has allowed individuals who do not meet credentialing standards upheld in other states to practice psychology in Hawai`i. It also leaves practitioners vulnerable to litigation, particularly during this uncharted time of virtual service delivery. We are asking for the State’s support in establishing credentialing for school psychologists in Hawai`i, both to ensure that students receive services from highly qualified professionals and to protect school psychologists and the DOE from possible legal ramifications relating to school-based telehealth services.

The Practice Model set forth by the National Association of School Psychologists delineates the standards, expertise, and training required to maintain professional competence, integrity, and trust. School psychologists are required to be forthright about their qualifications and abilities. In collaboration with other professionals, school psychologists apply expertise in mental health, learning, and behavior to support students, families, and schools. They receive specialized and advanced graduate preparation that includes coursework and practical experiences relevant to both psychology and education. When unqualified persons are employed as school psychologists, the integrity of the profession is compromised, and the public is placed at risk. Credentialing school psychologists ensures that specialized training and expertise is required to practice psychology.

In order to ethically and effectively utilize school psychologists to provide the triage and telehealth services that are so desperately needed during this crisis, and to protect the school psychologists providing such services, we urge you to move swiftly in implementing credentialing standards. This could be done in an expedited fashion by establishing a credential via the Hawai`i Teacher Standards Board. HASP is committed to supporting Hawai`i’s keiki during this trying time. Several Nationally Certified School Psychologists on our board are willing to volunteer their time and expertise to aid the state in establishing this credential and processing applications. HASP is confident that we all want competent professionals, assured of the ethical soundness of their practice, servicing our students during this time. We ask that you support the credentialing of school psychologists and utilize their full potential to ensure that all of Hawai`i’s keiki are afforded the help they need.

Sincerely,

The Hawai`i Association of School Psychologists