

As a member of the school counseling community for the past seven years, I can say that school counselors are essential within our schools. Our role requires extensive education, training, and care. It is not a position that anyone can fill. I say this not only as an assumption, but from experience. I have worked as a school counselor (more as an educator) at a total of five schools and have been affected by a similar situation relating to the proposed bill.

Many mental health professionals who are not in the field of school counseling do not understand the numerous responsibilities and proper care it takes to work with minors within a school setting. During my first year as a school counselor, I was asked to fill the role of two counselors. Operating on a provisional license, I was already overwhelmed working four days per week at a small-town school. Another school, almost an hour away, had hired a mental health professional who worked in an institutional setting and was not adequately trained or educated about the school counseling profession. The individual abruptly quit in October, citing "too much work and nothing like her previous profession." I was then recruited to work at that school and my own school for the rest of the school year.

My point in sharing this story is that other mental health professionals do not comprehend the depth of work required of school counselors. They are not trained to respond according to school counseling ethics and are unprepared for the variety of activities we are asked to do within a school setting, particularly those outlined by ASCA. School counseling entails more than just discussing difficult topics with students; we are much more than that. Therefore, I urge you to consider other options. Although we have a shortage of school counselors in North Dakota, we are also experiencing a lack of teachers. Just as we would not hire anyone who has ever worked with children to be a teacher, we should not hire anyone with a mental health background to be a school counselor.

Thank you for your consideration.