

Chairman Heinert, Vice Chairman Schreiber-Beck, and Members of the House Education Committee:

Thank you for reading this testimony regarding SB 2340, relating to required school counselors. I would recommend a vote of DO NOT PASS, or amending the current wording of the bill.

While under the umbrella of student support, the various mental health professionals/educators listed in the bill are not interchangeable and each have their own training and scope of practice. School counselors are trained to work within the educational system, with a significant focus on proactive and preventative approaches. This work is largely done by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program (CSCP) which supports student academic, career, and social/emotional development. The school counselor to student ratio is not arbitrary. The ratio helps to ensure school counselors can provide a CSCP to all students, which research has shown to improve student outcomes like better attendance, fewer disciplinary issues, and higher graduation rates.

The educational landscape has changed post-Covid. While students demonstrated great resiliency, they now work their way back from interrupted academic development and career planning and face social/emotional ramifications. This is a time to be exploring how we broaden access to supports and build robust systems. All the mental health professionals/educators listed in the bill provide incredibly important services to students and the goal is for continued collaboration.

The school counselor vacancies do need to be addressed because all students deserve support. Amendments that allow for flexibility in reporting, temporary contract for services for vacant positions, developing grow-your-own programs, filling vacancies with school counseling interns, or exploring loan forgiveness opportunities to encourage people to work in the profession are considerations.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Chasity Odden Heide, PhD
School Counselor