

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in opposition to SB 2340 as it is currently worded. I am a PreK-12 music specialist in a rural school district with just over a hundred students, and the need for a school counselor is apparent on a daily basis. Some of our students do receive services from other mental health professionals, either in person or via video chat, however, these are only the students that have the highest needs, leaving the rest of our students without daily access to essential services to help them navigate our changing world.

In my experience, ALL of our students need support from a school counselor. The vast majority of our students struggle with social skills and emotional regulation/moderation. There is a lack of discipline, work ethic, self-esteem, respect for self and others, and responsibility. Students come to us with minimal guidance on how to interact appropriately with their peers and teachers, which leads to challenging educational environments for teachers to navigate as they attempt to teach their content. As you are well aware, in addition to the shortage of school counselors, there is also a shortage of teachers. I firmly believe this is partially due to the challenging work environments that teachers face in today's schools, and many of those issues with student behavior can and should be addressed by school counselors. School counselors are tasked with implementing curriculums and programs that focus on developing social emotional skills. Having a consistent source teaching the curriculum throughout all grade levels, and setting the expectations for how the rest of the school can best support that curriculum, is essential to seeing growth with students.

School counselors are also an invaluable source of information for college and career development. Students need guidance from someone they trust and who knows them and their situation. Often, students don't know what they need, or what they should ask for. School counselors continuously seek out information on programs, scholarships, internships, job shadow opportunities, and career development options for the innumerable careers students may pursue.

I understand the desire to provide schools another avenue to fulfill the needs of students in the absence of a school counselor, however, it should be made abundantly clear that these stopgaps are meant to be temporary. Schools should be required to continue seeking someone who is trained and fully licensed as a school counselor, even while receiving temporary services from another mental health professional.

I recommend an amendment stating that schools may temporarily fill open positions with one of the other professionals listed in the bill but they are required to continue seeking a fully licensed school counselor.

I urge you to issue a vote of DO NOT PASS as the bill is currently written.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Kristen Lynch  
PreK-12 Music Specialist