

Chairman Elkin, Vice Chairman Bear, and the Members of the Committee,

Please give SB 2340 a DO NOT PASS.

As it is written, districts could pay for contracted counseling services instead of hiring school counselors. While I believe this was probably intended to help with the school counselor shortage, it might spur some districts to forgo hiring school counselors in exchange for contracted mental health services, especially if doing so saves money on a full-time equivalent salary and benefits package.

This would negatively impact our students. School counselors are trained to help students within the academic context, specifically in three core areas: social-emotional, career, and academic. We work comprehensively with students to help meet a variety of school-based and other needs; and our training is specialized to include educational systems, special education, and classroom instruction, among other things. While a full case load for a clinical mental health counselor may only include 25-30 students, school counselors are accustomed to having 300 or more students on a case load, and, rather than strictly providing therapy, can provide a variety of services for all students. Some of these include career exploration, scholarship searches, communication with parents and teachers, check-ins for social-emotional health, and many other specialized supports. Forgoing school counselors will limit the opportunities for students within that school or district.

There is a place for contracted clinical mental health counseling in schools; however, not in place of school counseling.

Let's find ways to recruit and maintain professional membership in the field, rather than reducing the valuable services provided to students by school counselors.

Thank you,  
Rachel Meuchel