



1/30/2025

Dear Representative SuAnn Olsen,

3-Minute Testimony

I am Rocky Malloy, the founder and CEO of the National School Chaplain Association. Over the past 28 years, we have provided certified professional school chaplains to public, private, and charter schools. Our certified chaplains service 35,000 schools. Based on our data, which encompasses more than 30 million people being serviced by our chaplains and over 35,000 schools, I present the following.

1. Mental Health Support for Students and Staff

The rise in mental health challenges among K-12 students in our nation is undeniable. Anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation have increased sharply, making schools the first line of defense. School chaplains provide essential emotional and spiritual support, complementing professional counseling services. Unlike therapists, chaplains offer holistic care, providing a safe space for students and staff to share concerns without judgment. Dr. Lida Miller, a leading expert in mental health and spiritual care, has provided compelling evidence that spiritual support significantly reduces anxiety and depression. Her research indicates that the absence of spiritual care in schools correlates with increased mental health disorders. At the same time, the presence of chaplains fosters resilience and emotional well-being, preventing more severe psychological issues.

Chaplains are clergy trained to work in secular environments who often help faculty, staff, students, and their families before problems escalate, reducing the burden on overworked mental health professionals.

2. Character and Moral Development

Schools play a key role in shaping not only students' academic abilities but also their moral character. Chaplains promote empathy, respect, and integrity through mentoring, group discussions, and school events. Their influence extends beyond individual interactions, fostering a culture of kindness and accountability. The impact of chaplaincy demonstrates remarkable outcomes:

- Up to **80% reduction in teen pregnancies**
- **37% increase in graduation rates**
- Dramatic reductions in **school violence and domestic violence**



- **No suicides** in schools with chaplains present for two or more years.

These outcomes show chaplains are critical in guiding school communities toward positive life choices and healthy relationships. By promoting strong character and positive behaviors, chaplains help create a safer and more supportive school environment where students can thrive academically and personally.

3. School Safety and Preemptive Measures

School safety is a primary concern for communities across the country. Chaplains enhance school safety by operating proactively and taking action before a crisis arises—what the military calls working "left of bang." Rather than responding to violence or emergencies after they occur ("bang"), chaplains focus on building trust and identifying issues early, preventing them from escalating into crises.

The foundation of this proactive approach lies in the unique relationships chaplains develop with students and staff. Chaplains create an environment where students feel safe discussing personal challenges, such as bullying, anger, or family problems. This trust gives chaplains critical insight into potential risks and allows them to intervene early through counseling or mediation. As a result, schools with chaplains report fewer incidents of bullying, violence, and self-harm.

Chaplains' ability to "operate left of bang" by addressing problems before they turn into emergencies is a key reason for increased safety and reduced violence in the schools they serve. Their ongoing presence and relational approach make chaplains uniquely qualified to address crises, creating a safer learning environment preemptively.

4. Crisis Intervention and Grief Counseling

When crises do occur—whether due to the sudden death of a student, a family tragedy, a natural disaster, or a traumatic community event—schools often struggle to provide long-term emotional support. Chaplains offer immediate care and sustained follow-up, ensuring that students and staff receive the comfort and guidance they need during difficult times. Their ability to offer grief counseling, prayer (for those who desire it), and emotional support helps schools maintain stability during such moments. Unlike temporary crisis response teams, chaplains provide continuous care based on trust and relationships, which are crucial for long-term healing and recovery.

Conclusion

Funding school chaplains is a strategic investment in community well-being, safety, and community resilience. Chaplains fill critical gaps in mental health care, foster character development, enhance safety by operating proactively, and offer invaluable support during crises. The data from our schools with chaplains is clear: reductions in teen pregnancies,

increased graduation rates, improved safety, and the absence of suicides demonstrate that chaplains make a measurable, positive difference.

As public education faces growing pressures, school chaplaincy offers a proven solution to create healthier, more resilient learning environments. Supporting this initiative ensures that students are prepared academically and emotionally supported, morally grounded, and part of a safer, more compassionate school community.

School chaplains provide parents with a campus advocate. Somebody they know is watching out for their child's best spiritual and social interest. The most important thing to a parent is that their children come home safe at the end of the school day.

Your investment in school chaplains is an investment in a better future for students, schools, and society.

Kingdom and Country,



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