

Opposition of HB 1490

My name is Megan Leingang and I am currently the 6-12 School Counselor at Washburn Public School. I am writing today in opposition to HB 1490 and the ridiculous implications it has for the school counseling profession. If this bill is passed, I feel that it will send the message to our communities that we are professionals that cannot be trusted. It undermines our training and de-values us as trained professionals.

School Counselors, in general, have more education than almost anyone else in our school buildings because our Master's programs require more classroom hours than others in education. This bill basically requires schools to hire us a babysitter to be with us in our offices all day. This does not make me feel valued as a professional. Also, we are trained to work with sensitive information with students and we have a code of ethics to remain confidential about what students share with us. How can we ensure that this other person has that same training and code of conduct? Also, they would not be trained in the same way as a School Counselor, so what happens if a student goes to the other person for an issue and they try to "do our jobs?" They are not trained in this profession and could have damning results when working with a student. Overall, I feel that this undermines my training and is insulting as a professional.

The other stipulation in the bill would allow School Counselors to meet with students alone only after getting a full psychological evaluation done. This brings up a ton of questions about the sustainability of the plan. Who will pay for these evaluations? Who will be responsible for doing the evaluations? The mental health system is currently already overloaded with cases and now we would be talking valuable time slots away from those in need to do this task. It seems silly to take away valuable resources from those that need it to satisfy this request. Also, the wait time currently to get in for evaluations is long and it takes time to process results. This seems to be overworking an already overloaded system! Lastly, why are only School Counselors being targeted with this bill? We are not the only profession in the school that works closely one on one with students. If this is about protecting our kids, should be not require everyone in the building to have his same requirement. In our last legislative session, School Counselors advocated to get a list of appropriate duties put into Century code so that we were no longer being required to do "non-counseling" tasks. We were told that no other education position had that in Century code, so we would not be allowed to have that. I feel that the same argument could be made here... no other educator is required to have this psychological evaluation (and numerous positions work individually with students), so I do not see how it would be allowable for School Counselors to have to meet that standard.

In summation, HB 1490 is an insulting proposal to those in the School Counseling community. We are trained professionals and strive to be the front-line workers that help our vulnerable students in crisis. We just want to be valued as professionals and in my opinion this proposal does the opposite of that. Please show School Counselors that you value their position in the schools and all the good work they do by opposing the passage of HB 1490.

Thank you,

Megan Leingang

6-12 School Counselor, WPS