

SB 2340

Thank you for taking this time to read this testimony, I imagine this time of year is extremely busy for you so I appreciate you being will to hear my concerns about SB 2340. There are many reasons I am not in support of SB 2340 and some ideas I have that could provide solutions to the shortage of School Counselors. I understand why people would think this bill sounds like a solution to an ever growing problem but when looking at the logistics it is easy to see this bill would not reduce the ratio for School Counselor's caseload.

The first reason this bill would not help reduce the student to School Counselor ratio is the idea of having School Psychologist or Social Workers meet with students or be assigned learners so a School Counselor's ratio isn't so high. People in these positions already have a full caseload and schools need more people in these roles. If a school was able to hire more Social Workers or School Psychologist they would have full caseloads within their roles, as their need is very high too. These people also are not trained School Counselors, their roles are extremely important but different from a School Counselors role, they would not add value to a comprehensive school counseling program.

The second reason this bill is not helpful is the idea of having any mental health professionals fill the role as a school counselor, for example the bill would allow addictions counselor or marriage counselors to fill a school counselor's role. It would be great to have people trained in mental health but not to fill the role of a school counselor, have more mental health counselors would be beneficial for our high needs learners but it is not beneficial to count them in the ratios because they are not always available and not available to all students. School Counselors are mental health professionals but also trained in other areas in order to create a comprehensive school counseling program. Again these professionals are trained and have very valuable skills but they are not school counselors therefore cannot be a part of comprehensive a school counseling program. I also personally feel it would be very hard to get these types of mental health professionals into the schools because they typically work with 20 people maximum and school counselors typically have a caseload of approximately 300. As a school counselor we do not meet with all of the learners consistently but we are available to them and I think it would be challenging to convince mental health counselors to fill this role.

Another reason the solutions listed on this bill are not helpful is having School Counselor go to different schools based on ratios does not provide consistency to our students. This bill would allow school districts to require School Counselors to go to another school a couple hours a week if their ratios at their "home" school fall below 300. This is not helpful because it is not elevating any work from the main school counselor because the person is only at the school a couple hours a week so the students wont know them. The fill in counselor would not be aware of what is going on at the school. I totally understand a school counselor doing two days at one school and 3 days (especially for smaller communities) but pulling a school counselor for a couple hours a week to reduce the ratio on the full time counselor is not impactful. Part of a comprehensive School Counseling program is having is having counselors available to the students and consistently around.

Some ideas for getting more people into the School Counseling Profession are partnering with universities, finding different options for the required year long practicum, and paying more. If schools were able to partner with universities there could be an increase in connections for people in the graduate program to work throughout their internship and practicum hours which would then reduce the ratios for School Counselors currently practices and make these hours more attainable to fill. It

would be more impactful for an internship student (who is in a Master's program to be a School Counselor) to fill the role as a School Counselor because they are invested in the profession, they are familiar with a School Counseling program, and they would hopefully stay around for more than one year. If these positions could be paid that would make going back for your Master's even more achievable for individuals interested in the profession but not able to take a year off of work to complete internship hours. If a person could be paid for their year long internship then they would be able to provide consistency to learners and gain real life experience while also alleviating some of the stress from the full time counselors. My final idea is paying School Counselors more, I imagine everyone feels they should be paid more but I do truly think this would help get people into the field. A person must have a Master's degree in order to be a School Counselor but we are paid on a teacher contract that does not require a Master's degree. This is very challenging because it is a lot of school for not a lot of pay, personally the last contract I signed was for \$44,000 in West Fargo, ND. I love what I do and have a very supportive team so I continue to do it but I am going to guess people do not go into this profession because of the lack of money and high demands.

Thank you again for taking the time to read this and hopefully understand why this bill is not helping an already overwhelmed position. Thank you for all you do each day.