

Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 1490
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Members of the House Education Committee,

Thank you for giving me the chance to speak today. I'm here because I deeply care about our school counselors and the students they support, and I have serious concerns about House Bill 1490. While I understand the need to ensure student safety and well-being, this bill has unintended consequences that could hurt the very people it aims to help and those it aims to protect.

1. Mental Health Stigma Hurts Everyone

One of the most concerning parts of this bill is requiring school counselors to go through psychological evaluations. This sends the hurtful message that having a mental health condition makes someone unfit to be a counselor. In reality, many counselors have their own experiences with mental health challenges, and that often makes them better at their jobs—not worse. They bring understanding, empathy, and lived experience to their work, and that connection is often what helps students the most.

By singling out counselors for mandatory psychological evaluations, this bill places unnecessary scrutiny on them and reinforces outdated notions that mental health struggles should disqualify someone from professional roles. Mental health conditions are common, manageable, and do not always impact a counselor's ability to do their job well. We would never ask this of other educators, administrators, or professionals in similar fields, so why are we targeting school counselors? This requirement may even discourage individuals from entering the field in the first place, further emphasizing the shortage of qualified counselors. Instead of disqualifying them, we should be supporting them.

2. Unnecessary Barriers for Counselors

Let's talk about reality. Finding a licensed psychologist for an evaluation isn't always easy, especially in rural areas. Wait times can stretch for months, and the cost of these evaluations? That's another major barrier. Who's paying for this? If it's the counselors themselves, that's an unfair financial burden. Many school counselors are already working with limited resources, often without enough mental health support for themselves. Adding another expensive and time-consuming requirement doesn't help them do their jobs, it just makes it harder.

Beyond the financial and logistical burden, this bill could create unintended roadblocks for both current and aspiring counselors. Some individuals may feel forced to disclose private mental health histories, which could create unnecessary fear and anxiety about whether their personal struggles will be used against them. This could discourage talented professionals from staying in or joining the field, further reducing the already limited number of counselors available to students.

Counselors work tirelessly to support students, often in underfunded schools with growing caseloads. They do this work because they care deeply about the well-being of young people.

Instead of putting unnecessary obstacles in their way, we should be doing everything in our power to ease their path and ensure they have the tools and resources they need to succeed.

3. Taking Counselors Away from Students

Counselors already have too much on their plates. They're juggling massive caseloads, dealing with crises, and supporting students through academic and personal struggles. This bill would force them to take time away from students just to complete more paperwork and evaluations every two years. Instead of adding red tape, let's focus on real solutions—like lowering student-to-counselor ratios and increasing funding for school mental health services.

Think about the direct impact of this requirement: Every moment a counselor spends undergoing evaluations, scheduling appointments, and filing paperwork is a moment they are not with students who need them. The students who are struggling with anxiety, depression, academic pressure, or personal crises will have fewer opportunities to get the support they need because their counselors are being pulled away for unnecessary reasons. These students need advocates, not roadblocks.

If we truly want to improve student mental health, we need to start by investing in counselors, not burdening them. More training, better funding, and policies that support—not scrutinize—they will go much further in improving student outcomes than excessive administrative requirements.

4. Breaking Trust with Students

Perhaps the most alarming part of this bill is requiring another faculty member to be present during counseling sessions unless a counselor has been evaluated. That's a direct violation of the trust students have in their counselors. Confidentiality is crucial—without it, students won't open up. They'll stay silent about their struggles, their crises, their pain. And when that happens, we all lose. We shouldn't be making it harder for students to seek help—we should be making it easier.

Students rely on their counselors to be a safe, confidential resource in their lives. Many young people struggle with deeply personal issues—abuse, trauma, mental health crises—that they may not feel comfortable discussing in front of another faculty member. If we strip away their sense of security and privacy, we risk pushing them away from seeking the help they desperately need.

This provision, while possibly well-intended, creates a chilling effect on the counseling relationship. Imagine a student who needs help but is too afraid to speak because they know another adult is in the room. How many cases of self-harm, abuse, or suicidal thoughts will go unreported because students no longer feel safe confiding in their counselor? This is not the direction we should be moving in if we truly care about student well-being.

Final Thoughts

I know this bill comes from a place of wanting to protect students, but the reality is, it would do more harm than good. Instead of creating unnecessary obstacles for school counselors, let's invest in real solutions that help them do their jobs better. Let's support them, not scrutinize them. Let's trust them to be the incredible professionals they already are.

Rather than making their jobs harder, let's focus on meaningful reforms that will strengthen the counseling profession and ensure students receive the care they need. School counselors are an essential part of a healthy, functioning education system, and they deserve our trust and respect.

For these reasons, I urge you to vote against House Bill 1490. Thank you for your time and for listening.