

**Department of Legislative Services**  
 Maryland General Assembly  
 2000 Session

**FISCAL NOTE**

House Bill 1279 (Delegate Burns)

Ways and Means

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**Public Schools - Guidance Counselors - Maryland School Safety Partnership Program**

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This bill establishes a Maryland School Safety Partnership Program to provide grants to local boards of education to hire additional guidance counselors in public schools that have a high incidence of violence or that have a high percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch.

Local boards must submit a report detailing the use of the grants and the ratio of guidance counselors to students countywide and per participating school to the State Superintendent by October 1, 2001, and each year thereafter. The State Superintendent must submit a report on the program to the Governor and the General Assembly by January 1, 2002, and each year thereafter. The Governor must include \$15 million in the State budget to implement the program, beginning in fiscal 2002.

This bill takes effect July 1, 2000.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** General fund expenditures would increase by \$15 million annually beginning in FY 2002. Revenues would not be affected.

(in millions)	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005
GF Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditures	0.0	15.0	15.0	15.0	15.0
Net Effect	\$0.0	(\$15.0)	(\$15.0)	(\$15.0)	(\$15.0)

*Note: ( ) = decrease; GF = general funds*

**Local Effect:** State aid to local school systems would increase by approximately \$15 million

annually beginning in FY 2002 to offset the cost of hiring additional guidance counselors.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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## Analysis

**Bill Summary:** Local boards of education may submit a proposal to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) for a grant to hire additional guidance counselors at specified schools. The proposal must include the amount of the grant requested and the intended use of the grant. The State Board of Education must select proposals to implement with priority given to (1) diverse areas of the State; (2) schools that have a high incidence of violence committed against students or faculty; and (3) schools in which at least 25% of the students qualify for free and reduced price lunch. At least two schools in each county must be selected to participate in the program. Local school systems are not required to provide a local match in order to receive State funding.

**Current Law:** Maryland does not have an official counselor-to-student ratio requirement. Local school systems determine the need for guidance counselors in each of its public schools.

**Background:** The American School Counselor Association (ASCA), the professional organization for school counselors, recommends one counselor for every 250 students in order to provide an effective program. In addition, the ASCA recommends that school counselors spend at least 70% of their time in direct services to students.

In the 1998-99 school year, 1,982 guidance counselors worked in the State's public schools. **Exhibit 1** shows a breakdown by school system and type of school. The State's public schools have on average one guidance counselor per 415 students. This ratio ranges from one counselor per 250 students in Kent County to one counselor per 599 students in Baltimore City. Guidance counselors are primarily responsible for counseling students with regard to their academic, career, and personal/social development. The level of counseling services provided to students varies across the State. On average, in the State's 24 local school systems, there is approximately one counselor in each elementary school, two counselors in each middle school, and three counselors in each high school.

Public schools employ staff, in addition to guidance counselors, who provide counseling and intervention services to students, including psychological and pupil personnel and social workers. Psychological personnel are responsible for evaluating a student's cognitive and emotional development, diagnosing educational and personal disabilities, and providing appropriate follow-up in the form of consultation or direct intervention. Pupil personnel

workers interact with the family, school, and community to determine the cause of and provide solutions for serious attendance, academic and/or disciplinary problems of students. School social workers are assigned to investigate, diagnose, and provide case work and group work services for students problems arising from the home, school, or community. Statewide, there are 523 psychological personnel and 291 pupil personnel and school social workers.

Unlike Maryland, which does not have an established counselor-to-student ratio requirement, Virginia's school accreditation standards impose a ratio requirement for elementary, middle, and high schools. At the middle school level, a public school serving 400 students must have at least one full-time guidance counselor. For each additional 80 students, the school must provide one additional "guidance period." Approximately seven guidance periods result in a full-time position. Schools with less than 400 students must hire a part-time counselor. At the high school level, a public school serving 350 students must have at least one full-time guidance counselor. For each additional 70 students, the school must provide one additional "guidance period." Schools with less than 350 students must hire a part-time counselor.

Virginia recently amended its accreditation standards governing elementary school guidance counselors. The new standard requires an elementary school serving 500 students to have either a full-time guidance counselor or a reading specialist. For each additional 100 students, the school must provide one additional "guidance or reading period." Schools with less than 500 students must hire a part-time counselor or reading specialist. Under the old standard, an elementary school had to hire a guidance counselor; reading specialists did not satisfy the accreditation standard.

**State and Local Fiscal Effect:** As stated in the bill's Preamble, the goal of the Maryland School Safety Partnership Program is to reduce the current student to guidance counselor ratio to 350 to 1 in elementary schools, 300 to 1 in middle schools, and 250 to 1 in high schools. To meet the recommended ratios under the Maryland School Safety Partnership Program for all public schools, an additional 570 guidance counselors would have to be hired by the local boards of education.

In fiscal 1999, the average salary for a school guidance counselor was \$48,841, ranging from \$36,422 in Garrett County to \$56,683 in Anne Arundel County. In Baltimore City, the average was \$48,120. In comparison, the average salary for a public school classroom teacher was \$42,545. Local school systems would have to spend approximately \$25 million to achieve the program's recommended ratio. This bill provides approximately \$15 million in State funding to hire additional guidance counselors which would cover approximately 60% of the total cost to meet the program's recommended student-to-counselor ratios in all public schools. The State Superintendent, however, is not required to select every public school for the program.

Administrative costs within MSDE would total approximately \$43,000 in fiscal 2001 and \$54,000 on an annualized basis to hire one staff specialist to set up, monitor, and administer the program.

**Additional Comments:** According to a 1995 report by the U.S. Justice Department, one in four people arrested for weapons offenses is a juvenile, and weapons offenses are the fastest-growing youth crime. A National Center for Education Statistics survey reported that over half of the schools in the country experienced at least one criminal or violent incident during the 1996-97 school year and 10% of schools experienced at least one violent crime. According to the Educational Testing Service, around 10% of 8th graders feel unsafe in school and 13% of the nation's 8th graders attend schools in which physical conflicts were a moderate or serious problem. Around 15% of students reported being victimized at school and 4% of students reported being violently victimized. More than one-quarter of students reported the presence of street gangs in their schools, nearly double the rate of 1989.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Maryland State Department of Education, Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - March 15, 2000  
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### **Exhibit 1 Student to Counselor Ratios 1998-1999 School Year**

<u>School System</u>	<u>Elementary Schools</u>	<u>Middle Schools</u>	<u>High Schools</u>	<u>All Schools</u>
Allegany	590	497	441	438
Anne Arundel	515	339	348	397
Baltimore City	2,007	389	315	599
Baltimore	532	305	338	389
Calvert	634	348	360	446
Caroline	523	320	228	343
Carroll	610	417	392	395
Cecil	491	311	250	321
Charles	505	744	340	460
Dorchester	382	389	242	307
Frederick	613	480	372	470
Garrett	801	276	288	412
Harford	589	391	334	421
Howard	863	269	280	407
Kent	324	163	268	250
Montgomery	544	298	288	376
Prince George's	467	438	331	400
Queen Anne's	431	389	304	378
St. Mary's	476	403	359	405
Somerset	457	346	296	369
Talbot	345	257	266	295
Washington	567	349	340	406
Wicomico	906	579	352	554
Worcester	516	232	309	345
Maryland	596	355	322	415

<b>Recommended Ratio:</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>250</b>
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Prepared by the Department of Legislative Services, January 2000

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