

## **Testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee**

### **In Support of H0515 Public Schools - Staff Members - Report**

Good afternoon Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee. I would like to thank Delegate Cain for inviting me to speak in support of this bill today.

My name is Holly Kleiderlein, and I am the elementary school counselor for 719 students in Anne Arundel County. I am in my 20th year as a school counselor, I have been a National Board Certified Teacher in School Counseling since 2006 and I am the Chair of the Legislative Committee for the Maryland School Counselor Association.

I know this legislative body cares about the mental health and well-being of my students. I know because in 2017 you passed the law known as the Start Talking Maryland Act, which requires students to learn about addiction and drug prevention strategies beginning in 3rd grade. What you don't know is that I taught those lessons to 339 students earlier this year. What you don't know is that in the past few years I have worked with the children of 5 parents who I know died as a result of opioid addiction and many others who are likely addicted.

I know you care about suicide prevention because in 2017 you passed Lauryn's Law, requiring me to take an additional graduate level course before the end of my next certification cycle to ensure that I know how to recognize warning signs of suicide and how to refer families to mental health services. What you don't know is in the past few years I have notified the parents of 18 students of their children's suicidal ideation, some as young as 8. I have had 5 students hospitalized for serious suicidal gestures and I am the person who helps transition them back to school.

I know you care about my students because you passed Erin's Law in 2016, requiring that all students receive instruction in sexual abuse prevention beginning in pre-kindergarten. What you don't know is that I'm the only individual teaching those lessons to all 719 of my students across 31 classrooms. It will take 47 lessons in one month to complete the unit. Those numbers don't tell you, however, about the child who asks to talk to me after the lesson to share about something happening in their life or the life of a classmate.

If you care about drug prevention, suicide prevention, and sexual abuse prevention, then you should be voting for HB 515 because you need to know how many staff members are available to implement the legislation you pass. School counselors are the only mental health professionals who work with every student in their building. That's why the American School Counselor Association recommends a student to counselor ratio of 250:1. I am the only mental health professional in my building 60% of the time. No child should have to share me with 718 other students.

Please vote in favor of HB 515. Thank you.

Holly Kleiderlein, NBCT