

HB496-Primary and Secondary Education – Mental Health Services – Expansion 3 (Counselors Not Cops Act).

I am testifying in favor of HB496-Primary and Secondary Education – Mental Health Services – Expansion 3 (Counselors Not Cops Act).

I live in Baltimore City, arguably a city that is entrenched in trauma. It amazes me that the past and current answer in addressing children with unresolved mental health issues primary because of traumatic experience is to involve law enforcement officers. That approach clear not only does not work but it adds more trauma as well as creating the systematic school to pipeline that has been normalized for many years. Baltimore City School System is not unique in that functionality-studies have shown that more than 3,000 students in the state of Maryland have been arrested during the 2018-2019, with ninth graders having the highest arrest. Furthermore, there have been publicized reports of students being targeted and harassed by School Resource Officers. This is not a practice that I, as a resident of Maryland and a graduate of the Maryland Public School System, believe should continue when I regularly see the outcome of the practice of having officers, some armed, in schools.

It is reported that \$100,000,000 is spent per year on policing public schools. That funding of officers in schools could better served in redirecting to employ more physical and mental health workers, bring in organizations that specializes in conflict reduction and restorative justice, and create space that allows for both mediative and meditative practices. Currently with the COVID-19 virus running rampant for almost a year now- taking lives, crippling businesses, and creating massive mental health issues, enough of our children are experiencing a health crisis that is the unthinkable. I am petitioning the elected leaders to get ahead and re-imaging better investment in the future of all children in this state. Thank you for your attention and care of this matter.

Charlene Rock-Foster

Baltimore City Resident