



House Bill 496

*Primary and Secondary Education - Mental Health Services - Expansion
(Counselors Not Cops Act)*

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Ways and Means Committee

Date: February 3, 2021

From: Drew Jabin

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 496. This bill would divert the state funding currently supporting the costly mandate of providing adequate local law enforcement coverage in schools to an additional school-based program focusing on mental health and behavioral services. This re-direction of funds – but increase in deliverables – would leave school budgets or local law enforcement to contemplate reductions in other education and public safety offerings to do so. This upends a fair system created only a few years ago.

Currently, \$10 million from the Safe Schools Fund is distributed annually in grants to local school systems and local law enforcement agencies to assist their compliance with a mandate to provide school resource officers or adequate law enforcement coverage. HB 496 would, beginning in Fiscal Year 2023, direct that \$10 million to a new program – expanding the availability of school-based mental health services and behavioral supports for students. This puts counties in the costly position of retaining the original mandated responsibility of providing school security, without the appropriate funding originally provided to coincide with that mandate. MACo does not raise concerns with the intent of expanding school-based mental health services for students, merely the diversion of the funds available for the existing safety measures.

Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **UNFAVORABLE** report on HB 496 as it withdraws the resources connected to an important but costly school program mandated by State law.