



Testimony on HB496
Counselors Not Cops Act
Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Ways & Means Committee:

My name is Ricarra Jones, and I am the Political Director with 1199SEIU- the largest healthcare union in the nation, where we represent over 10,000 healthcare workers in Maryland. Given the number of behavioral needs that children experience coupled with excessive policing in schools across Maryland, we are supportive of HB496-the Counselors Not Cops Act.

Before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, many children in the state of Maryland have and continue to suffer from behavioral health issues, many of which that go unidentified and/or untreated. Children have become victims of mental health issues with hardly any avail inside or outside of the home. Frequently, children who suffer from behavioral health issues can spill effects of these issues into the classroom which sometimes causes distraction(s) to themselves, teachers, and other students.

Due to this, many school resource officers meet this issue with either aggressive behavior or criminal consequences that can lead children to suffer from legal action, or even imprisonment. To combat this issue, Maryland must allocate proper resources and place more counselors in our school systems to properly diagnose and counsel children with these afflictions. Many of these children also tend to be children of minority parents which has not only furthered the "school to prison pipeline" system, but minority children also tend to suffer from other healthcare disparities compared to non-minority children.

For our members, this Act would give better security and assurance that if there are problems at home or in school, their children have a proper resource entity at school versus a police officer. This allows children not only the opportunity to academically succeed but to also grow their social skills with their peers and teachers. For a lot of our members who have a demanding work schedule, this provides additional help outside of the parenting that parents exercise daily.

For this reason, we believe that this legislation will create the necessary structure in place to improve overall long-term and short-term behavioral health for Marylanders and ask that you support HB496.

Respectfully,

Ricarra Jones
Maryland/DC Political Director
1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers- East
Cell: [443-844-6513](tel:443-844-6513)