



**TESTIMONY FOR HB0496
PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION – MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES –
EXPANSION (COUNSELORS NOT COPS ACT)**

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Wilkins

Committee: Ways and Means

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Cecilia Plante, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of HB0496 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

Our members believe that police officers have become over-used. They are the first people we call whenever we have a problem that needs solving, and in many circumstances, they are the right people to call. But they are not the right people to have in our schools.

Yes, our schools should be safe, and yes, there have been problems with students acting out and causing problems and sometimes threatening other students. That does not mean that we need police patrolling while our students try to learn. What we need are support staff that are trained in recognizing and diffusing behavioral issues – psychologists, counselors and other behavioral specialists.

We have to learn to treat the behavioral issues that students have, not just detain them or arrest them. This is the beginning of the school to prison pipeline that we must stop.

This bill would set aside grant money for the schools to use to hire the requisite number of psychologists, counselors and behavioral specialists to manage the caseload at their schools. It also sets up a board to look at the data from each school district and help with this process.

This is what our children need – counselors, not cops.

We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.