



HB496

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

DATE: February 1st, 2021

POSITION: Favorable

Schools Not Jails is a local non-profit grassroots advocacy organization dedicated to ending the school-to-prison pipeline. Schools Not Jails respectfully requests that the Committee issue a favorable report on House Bill 496, Primary and Secondary Education – Mental Health Services – Expansion (Counselors Not Cops Act).

Currently, the school-to-prison pipeline is a critical problem in Maryland public schools. Students in need of support are instead redirected into the criminal justice system at a young age. This is disproportionately true for students of color and students with disabilities. Executive Director Mckayla Wilkes personally experienced this issue as a student in Maryland public schools. Following the death of her aunt in the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001, she struggled to process her grief and had clinical depression for years before being diagnosed and getting the treatment she needed. During this time period, she was repeatedly incarcerated at juvenile detention facilities for missing class. Her story is unfortunately not unique.

House Bill 496 is a step to ensuring that our children are supported, not punished, when they need help. It would redirect the \$10 million/year SRO fund towards student mental health services, wraparound supports, and restorative approaches so that schools are able to provide the level of support their students need. It would require reporting on the use of force by school security and on calls to City or County police for incidents in school and it would strengthen the School Safety Subcabinet Advisory Board to include families impacted by school-based arrest, as well as experts in student mental health and conflict resolution. Although it is not a panacea when it comes to the problems that lie at the intersection of our criminal justice system and our education system, it is a crucial step towards ending the school-to-prison pipeline in Maryland.

For these reasons, Schools Not Jails urges a favorable report on House Bill 496.

For further information, please contact Mckayla Wilkes, Executive Director of Schools Not Jails at info@schoolsnotjails.org.