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PARLIAMENTARIAN

Ways and Means Committee



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 3, 2021

**House Bill 496 Primary and Secondary Education – Mental Health Services – Expansion
(Counselors Not Cops Act)**

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to present **House Bill 496 - Primary and Secondary Education - Mental Health Services - Expansion (Counselors Not Cops Act)**, which reallocates \$10 million a year that currently goes into the School Resource Officers (SROs) Fund to the Safe Schools Fund to support school mental health and wraparound services.

Across the state and country, the combination of harsh discipline for minor behaviors and armed police presence in schools is criminalizing students rather than keeping them safe. In Maryland public schools alone, 3,141 students were arrested during the 2018-2019 school year under the guise of protecting students. For Black students who make up only 34 percent of the student population but 56 percent of those arrested, as well as Latino students and students with disabilities who are often disproportionately disciplined in schools, SROs can be particularly harmful and lead to a hostile learning environment and physical/mental health issues with long-term negative impacts.

HB 496 helps make sure all students feel safe and supported in schools by providing evidence-based tools to promote safety and address the root causes of negative behaviors. This bill provides \$10 million to support school mental health and wraparound services. By using funds previously supporting SROs, schools will be able to hire counselors, social workers, school psychologists, restorative approaches practitioners, community school coordinators, and to implement trauma-informed practices so students can get the help they need. HB 496 also creates reporting requirements on the use of force in schools and on incidents reported to City or County police; and ensures families impacted by school-based arrests and experts who work directly with students on mental health issues and conflict resolution have a voice on the School Safety Subcabinet Advisory Board. **I have included some technical and clarifying amendments that do not change the substance of the bill.**

Students should feel safe and supported, but many do not because of an over-reliance on police in schools - leaving mental health and other critical services underfunded. To stop pushing students out of schools and into the criminal justice system, and to start addressing the social-emotional needs of our students, I urge the committee to give a **favorable** report for **House Bill 496**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jheanelle Wilkins".

Delegate Jheanelle Wilkins