



MARYLAND  
SCHOOL  
COUNSELOR  
ASSOCIATION

**Committee:** Economic Matters

**Bill Number:** HB 1120 Professional Licensing Portability - Members of the Foreign Service and Spouses

**Hearing Date:** March 4, 2026

**Position:** Support

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The Maryland School Counselor Association (MSCA) respectfully submits this testimony in support of House Bill 1120. MSCA represents professional school counselors across Maryland who provide essential academic, career, and social-emotional support to students in public schools statewide.

House Bill 1120 addresses the growing disconnect between Maryland’s student mental health needs, workforce shortages, and professional licensing frameworks that—while well-intentioned—can unintentionally prevent qualified school counselors from serving students during temporary federal assignments.

### **Why House Bill 1120 Is Needed**

School counselors are often the first mental health professionals a student encounters in a school setting. They play a central role in identifying concerns, responding to crises, and coordinating support for students and families. When counselor positions remain vacant—or when qualified counselors are delayed or discouraged from practicing due to administrative licensing barriers—students lose access to critical services.

Foreign Service families frequently relocate under federal orders for limited assignments. School counselors who are fully licensed and practicing in good standing in another state often arrive in Maryland prepared to work immediately but are unable to do so because they must complete a full state licensure process before practicing.

Because these assignments are temporary, the licensing timeline itself can prevent employment. By the time approval is granted, the assignment may be nearing completion. House Bill 1120 allows qualified professionals to practice under their existing license while

stationed in Maryland, ensuring licensing portability functions as intended across professions, including education.

### **Duplicative Requirements Under Lauryn’s Law**

Maryland school counselors are subject to profession-specific renewal training requirements established under **House Bill 947 (took effect in 2016)**, commonly known as Lauryn’s Law.

This law requires school counselors to complete:

- 15 Continuing Education Units (15 clock hours), or
- one semester hour of coursework every five years on recognizing and responding to mental illness and behavioral distress, trauma, violence, substance abuse, and youth suicide.

While MSCA strongly supports the intent of this training, the competencies required are already embedded within the 90 Professional Development Points (PDPs) required for certificate renewal. As a result, many counselors complete the same training content twice to satisfy separate regulatory structures.

For counselors relocating temporarily under federal orders, this duplication becomes a practical barrier rather than a professional safeguard. A counselor assigned to Maryland for a limited period may be required to enter a renewal cycle or coursework requirement unique to the state, despite already holding equivalent training and credentials elsewhere. The financial burden of coursework and the timing of renewal cycles can discourage otherwise qualified professionals from serving Maryland students at all.

House Bill 1120 appropriately recognizes that counselors who are licensed and practicing in good standing elsewhere should not be required to navigate duplicative state-specific requirements during a temporary assignment.

### **Regulatory Context and Consistency**

On January 28, 2025, the State Board of Education adopted amendments to COMAR 13A.12 that preserved the Lauryn’s Law training requirement while allowing limited flexibility through the Senior Educator Waiver when requested by an employing district. This update reflects MSDE’s recognition that renewal requirements should be applied flexibly in narrowly defined circumstances.

House Bill 1120 applies the same principle of targeted, temporary flexibility to members of the Foreign Service and their spouses — ensuring temporary relocations do not create unnecessary administrative barriers. This approach preserves standards while allowing flexibility when duplication serves no educational or safety purpose.

## **Impact on School Counselors and Students**

School counselors are a critical component of the school-based behavioral health team and are the only professionals charged with monitoring the needs of all students in a school, not just those already identified for services.

School counselors:

- Recognize mental health warning signs
- Provide short-term counseling and crisis intervention
- Coordinate care with behavioral health providers
- Deliver instruction promoting mental health awareness
- Support academic planning and postsecondary readiness

When positions remain unfilled, schools lose preventive and responsive supports that directly affect student well-being and academic success.

## **Workforce Shortages and Student Equity**

Maryland continues to experience shortages in student support personnel, including school counselors. The statewide student-to-school-counselor ratio remains above the nationally recommended 250:1 benchmark, averaging approximately 307:1, and in some schools exceeding 1,000 students per counselor.

These disparities represent a significant equity concern. Students in high-need schools are far more likely to attend schools where access to a counselor is limited, delaying mental-health intervention, academic planning, and crisis response.

Enabling Foreign Service members and spouses who are qualified counselors to serve immediately during temporary assignments helps schools fill gaps and ensures students receive support when they need it.

Reducing unnecessary barriers is therefore not merely procedural; it is a workforce and equity imperative.

## **Conclusion**

House Bill 1120 is a pragmatic and narrowly tailored workforce solution. By recognizing equivalent licensure for Foreign Service members and spouses during temporary assignments, the bill strengthens Maryland's education workforce while preserving professional standards and avoiding unnecessary duplication of training requirements.

It ensures students gain access to qualified school counselors immediately, rather than losing services due to preventable administrative delay.

For these reasons, MSCA respectfully urges a favorable report on House Bill 1120.

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