



MARYLAND  
SCHOOL  
COUNSELOR  
ASSOCIATION

**Committee:** Government, Labor, and Elections; Health

**Bill Number:** Senate Bill 242 – Modernizing Civil Relief for Service Members Act

**Hearing Date:** March 31, 2026

**Position:** Support

---

The Maryland School Counselor Association (MSCA) respectfully submits this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 242.

MSCA represents professional school counselors across Maryland who provide essential academic, career, and social-emotional support to students in public schools statewide.

Senate Bill 242 establishes a clear and consistent framework for licensure portability for military service members and their spouses. By clarifying the scope of practice, ensuring disciplinary accountability, and authorizing implementation through licensing authorities, the bill allows qualified professionals to continue serving without unnecessary interruption when relocating to Maryland under military orders.

### **Why Senate Bill 242 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 student needs, responding to crises, and coordinating supports for students and families.

When qualified school counselors face delays or barriers to practice due to licensure requirements, students lose access to critical services. This is especially concerning given Maryland's ongoing student mental health needs and persistent workforce shortages.

Senate Bill 242 addresses this challenge by ensuring that military-connected professionals can practice:

- **To the same extent and in the same capacity** as Maryland-licensed individuals;  
and

- Under the **same disciplinary authority**, maintain professional standards and accountability.

### **Importance of School Counselors**

School counselors are governed under the Education Article and are directly impacted by how licensure portability interacts with educator certification requirements.

Importantly, Senate Bill 242 preserves a **targeted and necessary protection** for school counselors practicing under military licensure portability. The bill explicitly provides that individuals authorized to provide school counseling under §10-14A-03 are **not subject to Maryland-specific renewal training requirements under §6-704.1** during the period of authorization.

This provision is critical.

Maryland’s school counselor renewal requirements—established under Lauryn’s Law—require additional specialized training that, while important, can be **duplicative of competencies already required for licensure and renewal** and impose additional financial and administrative burdens.

By providing temporary, targeted relief from these requirements for military-connected school counselors, the bill:

- Prevents unnecessary duplication
- Reduces barriers to workforce participation
- Ensures continuity of services for students

—while still maintaining long-term professional standards for Maryland certification.

### **The Central Role of School Counselors in Student Mental Health**

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.

According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), school counselors:

- Recognize mental health warning signs;
- Provide short-term counseling and crisis intervention related to mental health or situational concerns such as grief or difficult transitions; and
- Coordinate care with other behavioral health professionals when longer-term or more intensive services are needed.

In addition to direct services, school counselors advocate for the mental health needs of all students by delivering instruction that promotes mental health awareness, providing appraisal and advisement addressing academic, career, and social/emotional development, and implementing statewide initiatives such as **Start Talking Maryland** lessons.

### **Current Duplicative and Financially Burdensome Renewal Requirements**

School counselors are among the few educator licensure areas subject to additional, profession-specific renewal requirements. Effective July 1, 2016, Maryland required school counselors to complete specialized training related to recognizing and responding to indicators of mental illness and behavioral distress, including depression, trauma, violence, youth suicide, and substance abuse. This requirement was enacted through House Bill 947, commonly known as **Lauryn's Law**.

Lauryn's Law requires school counselors to complete **15 Continuing Education Units (15 clock hours)** or **one semester hour of academic coursework** every five years as part of the certificate renewal cycle. The Maryland State Department of Education has acknowledged that these competencies can already be earned through the **90 Professional Development Points (PDPs)** required for renewal, making the requirement duplicative for many counselors.

In addition, the option to complete one semester hour of academic coursework can be **financially burdensome**, as tuition and fees are borne by individual counselors. These costs present a real barrier in a profession already facing recruitment and retention challenges.

### **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 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.

Senate Bill 242 applies that same principle of **targeted, temporary flexibility** to military service members and their spouses—ensuring that counselors who are already licensed, trained, and practicing in good standing are not subject to unnecessary duplication or financial burden during a temporary or involuntary relocation.

### **Workforce Shortages and Student Equity**

The need for Senate Bill 242 must be understood in the broader context of Maryland's ongoing student support workforce shortages and unresolved equity challenges.

On August 26, 2025, the Maryland State Board of Education (MSBE) voted to adopt the Maryland State Department of Education’s (MSDE) updated Strategic Plan. That plan set a goal of increasing the percentage of schools with at least **2.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) student support professionals**, including school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, student personnel workers, mental health professionals, career counselors, and behavioral interventionists.

While this approach may expand access to student services, it falls short of the **Blueprint for Maryland’s Future’s clear intent** to ensure adequate access to school counselors specifically. A more targeted student-to-school-counselor ratio metric—originally discussed at the June 25, 2024, joint meeting of MSBE and the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB)—was never resolved.

Although MSDE initially included a student-to-counselor ratio metric in its May 2025 draft Strategic Plan, that metric was ultimately removed and replaced with the broader 2.0 FTE student support professional measure. This change eliminated a key accountability safeguard at a time when Maryland remains far from the nationally recognized **250:1 student-to-school-counselor benchmark**.

Currently, the statewide average student-to-counselor ratio is approximately **307:1**, with some districts exceeding **1,000 students per counselor**. These disparities represent a significant equity crisis that disproportionately harms students in high-need schools and communities.

Despite ongoing advocacy from MSCA, on September 30, 2025, the Accountability and Implementation Board and the Maryland State Board of Education voted to adopt the 2.0 FTE student support professional metric as part of the Strategic Plan update. During that joint meeting, AIB Chair Ike Leggett explicitly acknowledged the inequities in student access to school counselors reflected in current ratios.

In this context, reducing unnecessary licensure and renewal barriers is not merely an administrative concern—it is a workforce and equity imperative. Senate Bill 242 addresses a specific, solvable barrier by ensuring that qualified military-connected school counselors can enter and remain in Maryland’s education workforce without delay during temporary or involuntary relocations.

### **Conclusion**

Senate Bill 242 strikes an appropriate balance between flexibility and accountability. It strengthens licensure portability, supports military families, and preserves high professional standards.

Critically, it does so while providing **targeted relief from duplicative renewal requirements for school counselors**, ensuring that students continue to receive uninterrupted access to essential mental health and academic supports.

For these reasons, MSCA respectfully urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 242.

If you have any questions, please contact Jocelyn Collins at [jcollins@policypartners.net](mailto:jcollins@policypartners.net).