

Subject: Oppose SB525: Protect Access to Trained School Counselors

Dear [Representative's Name],

I am writing to express my concern about Senate Bill 525 (SB525), which would allow school districts and public charter schools to hire chaplains—either paid or volunteer—in place of trained school counselors.

This bill states that *“to be eligible for appointment as a school chaplain, an individual must be 18 years of age or older and of good moral character.”* These are the only qualifications listed for someone responsible for guiding and supporting students through complex challenges.

It also states that *“a school district or a public charter school may engage a school chaplain instead of a school counselor to perform the duties required of a school counselor.”* This is deeply concerning. School counselors are highly trained professionals who support students' academic, career, and social-emotional development.

While chaplains are valuable in religious settings, they do not have the professional training in mental health, child development, or crisis intervention that school counselors possess.

Unlike certified school counselors, chaplains do not meet the state’s educational requirements (Master’s Degree) and often lack critical training in:

- Child and adolescent development
- Mental health and suicide prevention
- High school graduation and college entrance requirements
- Curriculum design, counseling techniques, and assessment practices

Replacing trained counselors with chaplains puts students at risk and could undermine the mental health support, academic guidance, and crisis intervention they need.

Additionally, not all students are religious, and this bill risks alienating those from different belief systems. If families do not consent to their child meeting with a chaplain, who will provide the necessary support? School counselors are uniquely equipped to provide unbiased, inclusive support to every student. Furthermore, public schools should provide professional, evidence-based support for all students, not religious counseling.

I urge you to oppose SB525 and ensure that our schools continue to provide students with qualified, trained counselors who can support their academic, emotional, and mental well-being.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Your Address]

[Your Email Address]

[Your Phone Number]