

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on Public Education
For HB 3614

Compiled on: Friday, April 21, 2023 12:27 AM

Note: Comments received by the committee reflect only the view of the individual(s) submitting the comment, who retain sole responsibility for the content of the comment. Neither the committee nor the Texas House of Representatives takes a position on the views expressed in any comment. The committee compiles the comments received for informational purposes only and does not exercise any editorial control over comments.

Hearing Date: April 20, 2023 8:00 AM

Danae Lancaster
Self/Professional School Counselor
Wimberley, TX

HB 3614 would allow schools to replace certified school counselors with uncertified chaplains. Professional school counselors must have a Master's degree in school counseling and complete a counseling preparation program. There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill. Chaplains do NOT have a background in classroom guidance (creating/writing SEL lesson plans, classroom management, etc.), which is a core component of school counseling. Also, chaplains do NOT have a background in collecting and using school data and test scores to properly assess the needs of students. Please oppose HB 3614 when it is heard by the Public Education Committee on Thursday.

Susana Benitez
Self
Lewisville, TX

I disagree in this manner. If Chaplains are to have the same rights as Professional School Counselors or replace their position, they are to be required to have criminal background checks as well. Professional school counselors work with children every day, of all ages. Chaplains are not the exception to the rule!

Michelle Di Paolo, Dr
Self - Business Owner/Psychotherapist
Plano, TX

HB 3614 would allow schools to replace certified school counselors with uncertified chaplains.

Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling AND complete a school counseling preparation program.

There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill!

It is inappropriate to allow people who do not have training as a mental health school counselor to provide mental health services in a school.

Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

Please oppose HB 3614

Amy Creamer
Henderson High School
Longview, TX

This should not be allowed. Students need certified, qualified, educated, safe adults to counsel them. How is it in the best interest of a student to replace a professional with a master's degree/counseling certification with someone who is unqualified to do the same job? It is also very dangerous to allow adults to be with kids who have not undergone a background check. We don't even allow people to go on a field trip without having a background check. Now we want to let someone be alone with our children without anyone knowing their background. This should not be allowed.

Jasmin Moore
Self /Professional School Counselor
The Colony, TX

Please oppose HB 3614. Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program. There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill. Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling. Professional School Counselors are public school educators that help support children socially, emotionally, and academically. The role cannot simply be assumed by those that do not have the training and experience needed to support the mental health of students. Additionally, school counselors support families, staff, and the community. The role has a breadth and complexity that must be fulfilled by a certified school counselor.

Jana Moore
Self
Mount Pleasant, TX

Chaplains are religious figures who provide spiritual guidance and support. While they can be helpful in providing emotional support to students, they should not be allowed to perform the duties of school counselors.

School counselors are trained professionals who are equipped to provide comprehensive academic, social, and emotional learning to students. They work with students to identify problems and find solutions, provide guidance on academic planning, and assist with college and career readiness. They also work with parents, teachers, and administrators to create a safe and supportive learning environment for all students.

Chaplains, on the other hand, are primarily focused on providing spiritual guidance and support. While they may be able to provide some emotional support to students, they lack the training and expertise required to address the broad range of issues that school counselors encounter on a daily basis. Additionally, chaplains may have biases and beliefs that could impact the advice and guidance they provide to students.

Allowing chaplains to perform the duties of school counselors could also raise concerns about the separation of church and state. Public schools are legally required to remain neutral on matters of religion, and allowing chaplains to provide counseling services could be seen as endorsing specific religious beliefs.

While chaplains can provide valuable support to students in certain contexts, they should not be allowed to perform the duties of school counselors. School counselors are trained professionals who provide comprehensive support to students, and allowing chaplains to take on this role could raise concerns about neutrality and the quality of care provided to students.

Jeanne King
self, client support
Katy, TX

House Bill 3614, which would permit chaplains to take over the role of professional school counselors, should be opposed as it undermines the safety and well-being of students. Professional school counselors are trained and licensed professionals who provide critical mental health and academic support services to students. Replacing them with chaplains, who lack the same level of qualifications and expertise, could put students' mental and emotional health at risk. Furthermore, chaplains' religious beliefs and practices may not align with those of all students, potentially creating an uncomfortable or exclusionary environment. All students deserve access to qualified and impartial professionals who can provide comprehensive and evidence-based support. House Bill 3614 jeopardizes this crucial aspect of education and should be rejected.

CHRISTOPHER TRIMMER

Self, Finance
Houston, TX

Certification by the State Board for Educator Certification should remain a requirement to help insure a minimum set of standards for this profession.

Pam Sohan
Self/Mom
New Braunfels, TX

I am writing to urge you to vote against HB 3614. All counselors in schools must have the proper training and background checks to be hired. Chaplains would have none of these. They have no training in dealing with the many needs of children in school. They have no training in helping a child deal with abuse, or bullying, or how to help a child cope with learning differences, or how to counsel a child dealing with questions surrounding gender identity. These are all serious issues and would need more than just prayers. Also, not every child enrolled in public school is a Christian. It's hard enough for a child to ask for help, they need someone that will listen to their needs, and someone with the training and education to help them cope with their problems without bringing religion into the situation.

Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program. There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill. Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

Please oppose this bill.

Jared Williams
Self
Dallas, TX

Chaplains do not have the necessary training or experience to be school counselors. I have a Masters in Divinity and Marriage and family therapy, and I don't have the proper training and experience to be a school counselor. School counselors must be able to navigate the school system and provide guidance for students. There is no system to ensure that chaplains are certified and have been background checked. It would be a mistake to allow Chaplains to be school counselors.

Mario De La Garza, Dr.
self/counselor educator
Dallas, TX

Esteemed Members of the House Public Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to provide public comment as you consider HB 3614 by Representative Cole Hefner that would allow school districts to employ chaplains to perform the duties of school counselors.

Please consider that specialized knowledge is needed to work as a school counselor.

First and foremost, school counselors are mental health professionals. Many times, they are the professionals that note students require more intensive mental health services. Sometimes they are the only mental health professionals with which students and their families interact. Specific training in mental health, human development, assessment, and psychopathology are needed to fulfill these responsibilities.

Secondly, individuals who study to be school counselors learn models to deliver school counseling programs. Texas Education Code Sec. 33.005. mandates that school counselors plan, deliver, and evaluate a school counseling program using the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (Texas Model).

The Texas Model delineates ten school counselor responsibilities set forth in statute (TEC §33.006) and found in professional school counseling literature and research. These are program management, guidance, counseling, consultation, coordination, student assessment, advocacy, leadership, professional behavior, and professional standards.

Although chaplains do provide important services to community members, they are not trained as mental health professionals. They do not have specific training in child and adolescent development, assessment, and psychopathology. Chaplains do not take classes focused on counseling skills/interventions that counseling education programs provide. Granted, they may take a few classes on listening, but this is not equivalent to a program of study in which all classes are focused on counseling. Chaplains do not complete internships focused on counseling nor are they required to complete internships in schools. They are not trained to provide academic, social/emotional, or career guidance services to students. They are not familiar with models of school counseling outlining how to define, manage, deliver, and assess a planned comprehensive school counseling program. Finally, they are not aware of other standards that guide school counseling professionals including the Texas Educators' Code of Ethics and the American School Counselors Association Code of Ethics. These standards are taught in school counseling training programs.

I understand you want to provide students with caring adults to counsel and guide them. Specific training is required to do what school counselors do. Please support the training of more school counselors to meet this need. Certified school counselors are dedicated professionals with specific knowledge and skills to complete these tasks.

I urge you to not support HB 3614.

Respectfully submitted,
Mario De La Garza, Ph.D., LPC-S, NCC

Sally Elster
Self-School Counselor
Livingston, TX

I am a school counselor and have worked in education for 22+ years. School counselors are required to work as a teacher at least two years and complete a masters degree, before they can be a certified counselor. What training does a chaplain have to complete before working with school age children? Are they the most qualified people? As a parent should I be concerned they are bringing their religious beliefs into the schools, I am very much opposed at hiring a chaplain to do a teacher/counselor's job.

Nora Ramirez
Moe and Gene Johnson High School
Buda, TX

With so many needs in students now in days especially after COVID, we need certified counselors to address the emotional and academic needs students have. I oppose this bill! No one without a background check or certificate should be allowed in this role. This is a very delicate role when dealing with students. As counselors, we are responsible for meeting the needs of students, and someone that doesn't have the required certification should not be allowed in this role.

Sarah Cable
Pflugerville ISD
Round Rock, TX

While I respect a chaplain they have no professional training in crisis support and intervention. The mental health needs of our students are exploding, if we lower standards for support and care, we will only see more suicides and students not getting the support they need. We need to change the number of counselors supporting our students, it should be at minimum 300 students per counselor (certified counselor). I have already seen 3 suicides on my high school campus along this year, we need more COUNSELORS!

Mickey Folger
Hays CISD
Austin, TX

Although I like the idea of a chaplain on campuses for spiritual support for those students wishing to access that, these men and women are not certified mental health care specialists, nor are they familiar with Texas Education Agency policy, legislation, or requirements for graduation. The men and women who pursue master's degrees in the field of guidance and counseling have done so understanding this very specific role in public education. I oppose HB 3614 vehemently.

Public school counselors complete not only rigorous academic coursework, but are mentored by tenured counselors in order to gain practical knowledge for ethical and moral application of guidance and counseling in Texas schools. They have also served a minimum of three years as classroom teachers and understand learning objectives, assessments, and instructional activities. This culminates in the qualifications to serve students in a holistic way - serving the whole child. According to the Texas Education Agency's web site, "The multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) framework can be considered the umbrella for other support systems, such as data-based individualization (DBI), response to intervention (RTI), and positive behavior intervention and supports (PBIS). MTSS encompasses career, academic, behavioral, and mental health supports for all students" (Tier Network, 2020)".

The fact this bill suggests that chaplains need no credentials is a slap in the face to those who have worked tirelessly (often perhaps at the expense of their own family time, and while simultaneously teaching) to earn the level of competency needed to serve teachers, students and their families, and help create a culture of safety and support on school campuses.

I take extreme issue with the idea of removing the requirement for a background check for chaplains. Background checks enable school districts to conduct due diligence when hiring administrators, counselors, teachers, and other support staff. The ultimate goal of background checks is to preserve the safety of students, not to mention the integrity and reputation of the school, the district, and the state of Texas. Every other school employee, from the principal to the custodian, is required by law to have a background check before a job offer is ever extended. Why should chaplains be exempt from the process? They should not! The mere suggestion is offensive.

Again, a credentialed campus chaplain who has had a mandatory criminal background check would be a wonderful addition to support staff, but NOT as a replacement for professional school counselors.

Lydia Annayeva

self, graduate student in school counseling, Texas A&M- San Antonio
San Antonio, TX

As a professional school counseling intern and graduate student in a CACREP accredited university, I would like to let the members of the House Public Education Committee know that weakening professional school counseling (PSC) employment requirements would be detrimental to our Texas students in countless ways. First of all, professional school counselors are teachers. Many of the duties of professional school counselors require that they be skillful and experienced teachers. As part of a comprehensive school counseling program, according to the Texas Model, professional school counselors provide frequent guidance lessons on a variety of topics including, mental health and wellness, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, and academic readiness, which are tailored to students at each grade level. The PSC has to have broad knowledge of the educational, legal, and ethical standards necessary to provide for the needs of every student. The school's PSC is responsible for scheduling courses to ensure that each and every student is enrolled in the courses they need to advance and to graduate from high school. School counselors are also often tasked with being the testing coordinator or 504-plan coordinator, requiring even more specialized knowledge that those outside of the education field would struggle to master. The PSC has taken courses in individual counseling, group counseling, counseling theory; before graduating they will have interned for a minimum of 700 hours in addition to taking 50-plus credit hours in graduate-level courses that cover everything from human growth and development and mental health diagnoses to substance use and educational leadership and advocacy. In addition, research on evidence-based counseling theory and mental health conditions is an integral part of almost every graduate-level course a future PSC attends. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, school counselors are bound by ethical standards to "support students from all backgrounds and circumstances and who advocate for and affirm all students regardless of but not limited to ethnic/racial identity; nationality; age; social class; economic status; abilities/disabilities; language; immigration status; sexual orientation; gender identity; gender expression; family type; religious/spiritual identity; and living situations, including emancipated minor status, wards of the state, homelessness or incarceration." It is vital that the PSC remain a highly trained and experienced person in whom ALL students in EVERY school can trust and confide, knowing that they will not be judged for any one of the above categories listed in the American School Counseling Association's Ethical Standards for School Counselors. The opposition of this bill is necessary not only to maintain the integrity of the PSC profession and the viability of the comprehensive school counseling programs across Texas, but also to meet the needs of our students. Please oppose HB 3614. Thank you.

Bessie Neal, Retired High School Counselor

Texas Counseling Association/TSCA/TexAMCD
Richmond, TX

Committee members, please oppose this bill. School counselors in Texas have earned certain credentials to fill their positions. School Counselors do more than just counsel and talk to students. School counselors must know how to interpret and disseminate testing data. They must know how to organize and administer various tests on the state and national levels. They must know curriculum requirements for students to pass each grade level. At the high school level, they must know how to interpret transcripts and know the various state requirements for graduation. If all districts across the state will follow the "80/20" rule, school counselors will be able to fulfill their roles as counselors instead of professional paper pushers. It will be nice to have the chaplains on board but in another capacity to assist the counselors.

Chsrity Myers

Self

Austin, TX

I strongly feel that HB 3614 is not a good choice for our students, especially those in crisis or experiencing trauma. They deserve better than this. They deserve licensed therapists that are qualified to support them. Please veto this bill
Thank you

Julie Rodriguez

Self Mental Health Counselor

Austin, TX

The school counselor role follows mental health guidelines and are structured to make sure no harm comes to students. The school counselor role not only provides mental health supports but provides an educational component that school counselors teach social and emotional wellness lessons. The school counselor is certified in psychology and education to provide the best supports for students. The legislation should look at higher if Licensed Professional Counselors to help support mental health needs of students. School counselors encompass more than just counseling they provide supports for academics, college and career readiness, parental support, community referrals and lead the campus in social and emotional development. School counselors complete 48-60 hours of master graduate school programs and most programs consist of multicultural learning and understanding. School counselors in Texas are required to teach for up to two years in an academic setting and be certified teachers.

To place people who do not have these credentials or qualifications can cause harm to students and communities. More school counselors with qualifications need to be hired and paid for their work. Will chaplains be required to teach with certification for two years? Will they be held under ethical boards?

Amanda Dickenson, Ms

UTRGV counseling program

La Feria, TX

I as a studying counselor and current teacher I will say that knowledge about education is essential. Chaplains are not specifically specialized for that position. We must maintain the credibility of the profession.

Alayna Campbell

Self

Killeen, TX

This is unabashedly against the first amendment and denying students critical support from a trained counseling professional. Regardless of your feelings on whether or not school is Christian enough for your tastes, students NEED a TRAINED professional to help them on their path to success. A chaplain does not have the training needed to help our most critical cases.

Torrenzo Moore

self Licensed Professional Counselor

Katy, TX

Please Vote No on this bill!

Greta Davis, Dr.
Southern Methodist University
Richardson, TX

Dear House Public Education Committee Members,

I'm writing regarding the pending legislation that would allow school districts to hire Chaplains in place of Certified School Counselors in public education system. I am writing to you as a parent of two children, ages 16 and 13. My children attend public schools and have benefitted from the help and support of their school counselors who possess specialized training and education in mental health and career development. I'm also writing as a professional counselor and educator who teaches and trains mental health counselors and school counselors in a graduate education program in Texas.

Please consider that specialized knowledge is needed to work as a school counselor. Often, school counselor are the only mental health professional in the schools who can accurately assess mental health concerns. They make decisions to intervene in crisis situations, attend to children who are experiencing suicidal ideation, and appropriately elevate concerns to keep our children safe. They take specific coursework related to human development growth and development, assessment, and psychopathology along with additional training in career development. Also, those who train to be school counselors learn become familiar with the Texas Education Code which mandates that school counselors plan, deliver, and evaluate a school counseling program using the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (Texas Model) and they create these comprehensive programs that help support the academic environment.

Chaplains are not trained as mental health professionals. They do not have the necessary training to replace the school counselor role. Chaplains have no required training to understand school environments, governance or structure. They don't have training in classroom management (like school counselor would have in Texas). They are not trained to provide academic, social/emotional, or career guidance services to students. They are not familiar with models of school counseling outlining how to define, manage, deliver, and assess a planned comprehensive school counseling program. They are not able to care for our students in K-12 environments appropriately as it relates to mental health support or career guidance and support.

If there is an expressed need for interfaith and ecumenical clergy/chaplains to support the efforts of a school, perhaps a bill could be introduced to support the spiritual needs of students. However, giving schools the option to replace school counselors is dangerous as they will have the skills to address the needs of students.

I strongly urge you to vote not on HB 3614.

Sincerely,
Greta A. Davis, PhD, LPC-S, NCC, CCC

Stephanie Corley
Self - Data Analyst
Houston, TX

Education, certification, and background checks absolutely have to be required to protect our children

Michele Pierson, LCSW-S
Self, parent, mental health professional
Austin, TX

Our children have continued to feel the impact of the pandemic with education loss, family stressors, financial pressures, grief, loss, increased isolation and what they need to deal with this mental health crisis is more support via resources for teachers, counselors, and mental health professionals NOT a chaplain. Schools should be safe and inclusive for all students and families. Having a chaplain to provide support feels divisive and unsafe because this would not require appropriate training and licensure. Please reconsider this proposed bill. Thank you, Michele Pierson

Rachel Privitt

self

Plano, TX

As someone who is trying to become a school counselor, I do not believe this would be a good bill to pass. First, without the training I am currently receiving, I do not believe that I would be an effective school counselor. If a chaplain comes in without the training specifically for school counseling or without any school training at all, how would they be effective? Until you've been in a school system and done the training, you have no idea what it's like. I understand chaplains help out those within the community, but they are not mental health professionals. Secondly, school counseling positions are already limited. Bringing chaplains in to fill those already limited jobs would cause the jobs to be even more scarce and competitive. Please let them stick to what they know, assisting the community within or outside of a church, and help us to stick to what we know as mental health professionals.

Sandi Walker

Self, Keller ISD

Fort Worth, TX

As a mom of 6 and also the Vice President of Keller ISD School Board, I fully support this bill!

Cindy Kalisky, Counseling coordinator

Comal isd

bulverde, TX

Counselors have paid for masters degrees and certifications. Counselors have kept certificates by participating in yearly training in SEL and academic counseling. Chaplains have not! Chaplains could be turned away by parents/students due to religious affiliations. Counselors have also been teachers and understand the connections with teacher/student relationships and expectations. Chaplains have not!

Meghan Blakey

Self, school counselor

Spring, TX

School counselors are professionally certified to work in schools with students ranging from early childhood through 12th grade. The requirements to be a school counselor include time teaching in the classroom, a bachelors degree, and a masters degree in school counseling. Years of school work, work with students, and supervision are required to be degreed as a school counselor in Texas. Chaplains, who have had none of this training or experience, should not be allowed to be used in place of certified counselors. Parents and students expect counselors to be competent in educational matters, school supports, and graduation requirements to ensure that every student is provided with accurate and helpful information during their time at school. Chaplains would have no educational background knowledge to use in a position in a school and would be highly unqualified to provide adequate services to students and families.

Melody Vickery

Self

Lolita, TX

I oppose this bill. I am a school counselor and have a Master's of Education in Counseling and I hold a certification to work in a Texas school. I am highly trained in the counseling field with many hours of extra hours in professional training. I have been a teacher for ten years, a high school counselor for 20 years and now an elementary counselor for 4 years. You tell me how a chaplain with no credentials in education and no degree in counseling could hold a candle to my credentials and experience. Working with youths in a church group does not give a person the same credentials as a school counselor. If you are backing this bill because there might be a shortage of counselors in the schools, then obviously there is something wrong with the system that needs to be fixed. Not replacing highly qualified and educated counselors with a chaplain. Vote NO for this ridiculous bill.

Amy Culberson

Self

SPRING, TX

Chaplains are an important part of society but do not belong in the schools, hence separation of church and state. School Counselors work hard to build strong relationships with students and to be an integral part of their lives. As trained professionals, School Counselors are able and ready to help student's through any emotional and social issues.

Chelcie Tomme

Self - LSSP

Tomball, TX

I am against allowing school districts to employ chaplains to perform duties of a school counselor. School counselors are trained in both education and mental health. This includes aspects such as risk assessments, scheduling/transcripts, state assessment, school-based mental health services, and other factors that affect student livelihood and outcomes. School counselors are also required to have served as a teacher for two years. While a chaplain has an important role in society, it is not in schools. If a chaplain would like to pursue becoming a school counselor, they are free to complete the requirements set forth by TEA and graduate programs in order to obtain their school counseling certificate. Our children deserve and depend on receiving the highest level of support from specially trained professionals.

Dawn Kirk, Counselor

Self

Magnolia, TX

Effective School counselors are trained to provide emotional support as well as guide students and families through the best possible path for high school graduation and post secondary endeavors. There are so many experiences in the Education system that support and grow the skills of teachers that are then applied to a comprehensive counseling model. These counselors are able to serve the needs uniquely with the experience of the classroom and having already navigated the dynamic of working with the students' families. For all needs to be met we must have educators in the counseling roles. The parents/guardians, teachers or administrators of our Texas students are not equipped to navigate Texas high school graduation requirements and the school counselor plays a vital role in getting our children across the stage at graduation. Thank you.

Ashleigh Lawrence

Self/retail clerk

Lake Jackson, TX

Hello.

School counselors handle many different types of situations on a daily basis. School counselors undergo rigorous training to best handle students facing a multitude of challenges. Counselors need to be able to handle students in potentially vulnerable situations without shaming or judging the student involved. This bill is a blatant violation of separation of church and state. I do not support this bill. Please register my opposition. Thank you.

Daphene Woods, LMSW
Self- social work, therapist
The colony, TX

As a Texas state Licensed Master Social Worker, it is imperative to voice concern regarding removal of accredited, trained, and informed counselors from Texas school districts. This bill implies that all mental health needs met by a counselor in this current climate can be easily rendered through a chaplain who is not in fact trained or licensed by the state of Texas in mental or behavioral health care. Further more a Chaplain's scope of practice does not entail awareness of mental and emotional health, or ability to observe problematic behavior in accordance to psychiatric disorders outlined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders V-TR. To do this would uphold religion as a basis of support and mental health care that not all students seeking a counselor for a variety of reasons will support. Counselors in the state of Texas are required to provide multiple efforts in maintaining and renewing their license per state guidelines every two years which encompasses further continued education credits for that counselor to suggest consistent training in areas of practice. Counselors are trained to deal with a variety of issues surfacing in students of varying ethnicities, religious or political backgrounds, and socioeconomic status without bias to which end is supportive to the client. To assign a chaplain to complete said duties will cause a further gap in mental and behavioral health services than is present now. Counseling in schools require a network of resources, case management, follow up care and observation of behavior change over time. To place an individual in such a role of high responsibility completely undermines the extensive state regulated requirements for counseling professionals in the state of Texas. It also limits the span of support to students as it will now be synonymous to religion which may or may not support some school students need for a counselor. It is with my strong opinion and experience of psychiatric practice in the mental health field that this bill not be passed as it removes years of outlined support systems/resources created by counselors to educate, inform, and support students and their families. This would be a disservice to all students and school districts as a Chaplain's scope of practice cannot span across Texas state resources per district. Counselors are licensed by the state for a multitude of reasons and it is imperative that we see mental health professionals as seriously as we would a medical professional, with that said I am aware there are no current ideas to replace a Texas state licensed nurse by another individual of any stature.

Lastly, a chaplain does not come endorsed with ability to provide psychiatric testing for present learning disabilities that require the state provide 304 accommodations for said student in that district. A chaplain also does not have guidance or requirement of duty to warn regarding reported cases of neglect and abuse per Texas law.

kelly rice
self LPC
Livingston, TX

This would be a detriment to our children to not have trained professionals available to work with them on mental health. Chaplains can be a support for the schools but should not be employ to provide mental health services.

Laura Hernandez
Self - School Counselor
Cypress, TX

As a certified school counselor, I had to complete a 60 hour graduate course and pass the state certification test to serve the students on my campus. The skills that I learned in this course work were specific to be able to serve the students, staff, and community of my campus. It is saddening to learn that the state believes chaplains without the same training that I have had are able to fulfill the role I pray on my campus to serve the social and emotional needs of students.

Rebekah Tuer
Self
spring, TX

Counselors are vital to schools. Our students depend on them. Chaplains could not do the same job.

Brandon Awbrey, Dr.
Self, Counselor Educator
Abilene, TX

Chaplains main duty is to see to the spiritual needs of an individual where school counselors are trained specifically to attend to the educational and mental health needs of young students. School counselors have an undergraduate degree and training in education including developmentally appropriate ways of interacting with children. They also possess a Masters degree with hundreds of hours of supervised clinical experience. Currently school counselors must have classroom teaching experience. They are responsible to the TEA, the counseling and teaching professions, above the simple oversight of district administration.

A chaplain may or may not have specific credentials or training in working with children with special needs, mental health issues, and a host of other training and experiences that are requirements for current counselors. Because of non-standardized training and backgrounds, allowing half trained individuals to handle sensitive situations they are not fully prepared to handle is a terrible risk. This is akin to allowing a paramedic to practice medicine as a physician.

Sarah Yeoman-Lomangino
Self, clinic manager
Sanger, TX

I oppose this bill. School counselors have masters degrees in counseling and an extensive understanding of the needs of school children. Chaplains are not required to have either. Furthermore, most chaplains employed will undoubtedly be Christian, which would do little to help students of other faiths.

Vicki Nixon
Teacher/ self
San Benito, TX

This is crossing the line. School counselors come with endless training and certifications to help all students of every denomination. What are the plans for students who don't believe in Christianity? No counseling? My autistic 13 year old son chooses to believe in science. It takes him months to years to build relationships. All of his school counselors have been well versed in autism and take the time to listen to him. He does not need someone to dole out religious advice. You are trying to change public schools to fit your Christian ideology. This is a shame. It is bad enough that Texas insists on defunding schools, now you want to replace our kids life savers? On a side not, will your chaplains also handle the thousands of requests changes that happen every year at the secondary campuses? Will they attend the ARDs of their students and be well versed in the protocols so that they don't put the school district on violation? What will they tell students who need a safe space? Keep our school counselors in ublic schools and keep your chaplains in church.

LEEANN BARREDA
Self
Brownsville, TX

Please respect ALL of our public school children by keeping church and state separate, and by allowing them to continue to be counseled by highly educated and qualified professionals.

Eileen Borski
Self, Licensed Professional Counselor
Montgomery, TX

I oppose the use of Chaplains to perform the duty of school counselors. The skill, education and experience of chaplains is not in line with the needs of the children served in school districts.

Monica Zamora
Self. Mother
Brownsville, TX

The duties of a school counselor should only be performed by professional counselors with an actual psychology/counseling degree. People who actually are devoted to this profession should be employed, due to the fact that these individuals have the right education and are prepared for such job.

Vanessa Coronado
Self EDUCATOR
Brownsville, TX

I strongly am against this horrible bill. NO religious chaplain or entity should be employed by any school district to take the place of school counselors. To put forth this bill means you are pumping ideologies that have no business in a public school. Not just that but to vote yes on this bill would mean you are infringing on every individuals constitutional first amendment to practice our own religion or none. I disagree with this entire bill. PERIOD. School counselors are VITAL to our children and to remove that would be detrimental. Do not sneak your ideologies into public schools.

Jan Morrish
Harlandale ISD
San Antonio, TX

This is wrong! As an elementary school counselor, who taught school for 10 years and got a Masters in School Counseling, I know what is best for children! I help them with skills through SEL so that they succeed in academics. Helping a child with their emotional needs helps them become better students. My experience as a public school teacher has helped me to become a very effective school counselor!

John Shirley, Mr.
Retired public school educator
Bastrop, TX

This bill would allow a group of individuals, although I am sure highly educated, to become school counselors without any school teaching experience or with the credentialing now required for school counselors. Understanding the school environment, working with parents and children are specialized skills that only professional educators and counselors possess. School counselors not only have to have teaching experience before becoming a counselor but they are also required to have a masters degree in counseling or a related area. This would be a big mistake!!! John Shirley - retired public school educator.

Abbie Mahan
Self and all children
South Padre Island, TX

Chaplains are not appropriate to act in a public school nor are they trained and educated in child development /psychology.

ASHLEY MAYTUM
Self; elementary school teacher and graduate school student for School counseling
Boerne, TX

The School counselor goes through extensive training to be able to help students learn tools to manage their emotions, help teach behaviors to maximize learning and help develop plans to help children of all ages learn how to self-regulate. What duties does a chaplain need to perform in a public school?

Jennifer Matus
Self-School counselor
Spring, TX

As a certified school counselor in the state of Texas for the last 16 years, this bill CANNOT pass. The role of the school counselor, according to the Texas Comprehensive Model for School Counseling consists of 4 main areas-specifically guidance curriculum, responsive services, system support and Individual planning. School counselors attend 6 years of school to specifically to learn skills and strategies that prepare them to run a comprehensive school counseling program on their campus. Do chaplains undergo such extensive course work and training? Are chaplains skilled to be able to advise and guide a student through selecting the correct courses to fulfill the state endorsement and credits required for graduation? Do chaplains undergo graduate level training in psychological theoretical frameworks designed to best support students at their developmental level? Are chaplains state certified educators first for a minimum of 3 years before assuming their role as chaplains in order to gain insight and direct experience on best educational practices to successfully teach the Texas TEKS in one or more subjects to students? Are chaplains prepared to run proactive programming on campuses to support a MTSS system impacting the campus culture and system as a whole? Are chaplains prepare to guide teachers in best practices for classroom management and behavioral intervention and prevention strategies? Are chaplains skilled and prepared to assist with the implementation of testing such as STAAR, TELPAS, COGAT, and EOC's? Are chaplains prepared to guide a student, family and campus through the process of a student requiring a referral for special education services or accessing 504 services? I am going to go ahead and state chaplains are most definitively NOT ready to take on even these few of the many responsibilities school counselors oversee and coordinate on a daily basis, juggling multiple of them at a time. I think chaplains do have a place supporting the community in hospitals and churches as a source of comfort during an emotionally challenging time, however, I think it would be doing students in the state of Texas an extreme disservice to say chaplains are even remotely prepared to take on the role of a school counselor.

Sadaf Meckfessel
Licensed Professional Counselors
Keller, TX

I have deep concerns about allowing chaplains to perform the duties of school counselors. Students come from varied belief systems and many would not feel comfortable coming to a chaplain for help as they would an impartial, specifically trained for handling school issues, school counselor. This would alienate many populations of students. Furthermore, our students deserve to have public education not be faith based. Education is not secular, it should be grounded in facts and research. Students may obtain support from chaplains from their church that they CHOOSE to attend.

Karina Rodriguez
TSTA
Pflugerville, TX

School counselors are certified and trained and go to school for years to learn their profession and how to best deal with their job. With all due respect, a chaplain is a representative of a religious tradition, not a public school employee. That's why we have separation of church and state. A chaplain will not be representing all religions or will they? If they won't it won't be fair. They must also have full background checks. A chaplain cannot perform the duties of a trained, certified counselors who received a bachelors degree, masters's degree, teach two years in schools, and take certification exams which all pertain to counseling. Chaplains do not have that professional experience.

Sylvia Campbell
self, retired
The Woodlands, TX

Dear Public Education Committee,
HB 3614 concerns me. Our nation holds to the conviction that a strong democracy requires the separation of church and state. This bill smacks of encroachment of church into a state institution, public schools. While the overall intention, to help deal with the shortage of school counselors, may be of value, the price is too high a cost to pay. Not all families in Texas are Christian, and they need not be concerned that their children might not be served fairly by a Chaplain. Licensed school counselors are trained to provide services to all students equitable and must adhere to the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics. We must uphold this standard. Please OPPOSE HB 3614.
Thank you,
Sylvia Campbell

Mary Smith, Ms
Retired/self
Arlington, TX

Notinfavorofthisbill.
Noguidelinesaresafetymeasuresincluded.

Denise Sanders, Ms
Self -Retired
Orange, TX

I strongly oppose passing HB3614 for the following reasons. At this time school counselors are professionals. Therefore they are required to have not only a bachelor's degree, but a master's degree in counseling as well. School counselors are also required to complete school counseling preparation program. HB3614 does not require chaplains to have ANY credentials. Along with no background checks required for chaplains! This is absolutely unacceptable in my opinion. If students are seeking prayer and or guidance from a chaplain I have no problem whatsoever with that, but it should be separate from school and certainly not to replace the experience, knowledge and training of our professional school counselors. Please put our children's best interest first & foremost in your decision to not pass this bill. They, along with their parents, deserve the highest possible qualifications in their school counseling needs & guidance. It will be in the best interest of all involved to vote NO regarding HB3614. Thank you.

Kimberly Parr
Self
Mabank, TX

I am absolutely opposing this bill. Trained counselors with background checks should be in schools not chaplains with religious agendas.

Keely Vanacker
self
Kerrville, TX

Chaplains have always played an important role in our lives. We have looked to them for spiritual guidance and to help uplift us in times of sorrow. However, the role of a school counselor is multi-faceted and cannot simply be replaced by a Chaplain. Our role is specific to education and specific to working with the needs of children of all ages. Yes, we provide guidance and uplift students in times of sorrow, but that is not all we do. We teach classrooms of students how to manage their feelings, we teach about potential careers, how to stand up to bullies and so much more. We work directly with teachers to develop strategies to help difficult students, we sit on threat assessment teams, we are the first on call for a crisis and we develop and help implement school wide programs to promote a positive culture and a place students want to be. While no Master's degree or internship can prepare a school counselor for every aspect of their job and every situation that may arise, that initial training is critical to understanding the role we play in a school. I encourage the member's of this committee to review the full "Texas Model for School Counseling Programs" and then ask the question, can a Chaplain who is untrained in school counseling, who's only experience in schools was to attend one themselves, and who's only requirement (according to this bill) is to have a piece of paper they can get from the Internet that says they are a Chaplain, really truly handle the school counselor role? The answer is "no", they can't.

If this committee is truly serious about trying to find ways to keep school counselors and encourage more people to join our ranks, here is a list of things you should consider:

1. Some school districts only pay counselors for the extra contract days they work. Essentially, they are paid exactly the same as a teacher. Require schools to pay additional stipends just for being a counselor, in addition to the additional contract days.
2. The 80/20 rule was a great start, but had no enforcement. Make school districts actually follow the laws you write.
3. Provide more resources in the community for which school counselors can actually make connections and truly provide help not just for the child they work with but the whole family. Fully fund MHDD, Child Protective Services and more. We need more psychiatrists, licensed counselors, social workers, case managers in our community. So often, school counselors are the only assistance for a whole family.
4. Provide affordable college. Many teachers had to take out loans for their undergraduate degree. Completing a master's program requires additional loans. There is very limited upper mobility in pay when becoming a school counselor, that can justify taking on more debt. College needs to be affordable for all.

Ruby Sanders
self
Cedar Park, TX

- Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program.
 - There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill which is a direct endangerment to all children in public schools.

Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

Additionally, I feel that students struggling with LGBTQ or ANY other religion would not feel comfortable to speak freely with a Chaplin in a public school. Separation of a church and state is still in the Bill of Rights and with very good reason.

Amber Clark
School Counselors
Sherman, TX

One of the most important factors of being a SCHOOL Counselor is being able to support the teachers along with the students. Having to be certified teacher before becoming a school counselor is vital for several reasons. One being you are able to relate to the teacher and you have more of their respect because they know you have been in their position before. Two you are able to understand certain student behaviors from being in the classroom. If you have never been in a classroom as a teacher, you would not be able to truly grasp the struggles of both the teachers and the students. Texas has put an emphasis on having "highly certified" teachers, yet you are considering putting one of the biggest resources for both teachers and students into a position with no prior knowledge of the education system and the struggles and stress teachers and students face daily.

Hilary Toma
Self
The Woodlands, TX

I ask the Committee to OPPOSE HB 3614. Chaplains do not belong in public schools and taxpayer dollars should not be used to pay their salaries. They also do not have the appropriate training. Licensed school counselors are trained to provide services to ALL students equitably and must adhere to the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics.

Rebecca Davies
Self
Georgetown, TX

This bill is unconstitutional and violates the separation of church and state. I urge you to reconsider this. School counselors offer a valuable service and clergy do as well but their role is not the same. One does not fit into schools. Do not confuse the two. They are not interchangeable.

Christina Powell, Ms.
self, School Counselor
Austin, TX

Schools absolutely need more help to address the mental health needs of students. However, it is critical to ensure that adults working in these roles are specifically and specially trained in the area of mental health to be able to appropriately address and support students. School Counselors are trained in counseling at the masters level in the State of Texas, before we are able to work with students. It is imperative that we continue to keep those standards high, to ensure the best support for our students.

Sarah Cable
Pflugerville High School
Round Rock, TX

What happened to the separation of Church and State? If we are going to allow Chaplains to serve as school counselors, what about a Jewish rabbi or a Muslim leader? How do you deem one is ok and not all of them. How does a student who is not religious feel comfortable confiding in their assigned school counselor if they have different religious views? Right now counselors religious views are private, but if a Chaplain serves as counselor, that is NOT private. What happens when a student gets pregnant and confides in their counselor/Chaplain, are they responded with religious responses? There are just so many WRONG things with this suggestion that I can't even believe it is being reviewed. What has happened to make people think this is a solution?

Rhonda Anderson
Self
Longview, TX
Fully in favor of this bill

Mary Selby

Self

Austin, TX

I am in strong opposition for districts to employ chaplains to perform the duties of school counselors. Counselors are trained and certified to provide care for children without bias and with safety in mind for children. I want to also stress not all parents (parents choice) want a chaplain to be the only source for a child to go to at school.

Amy Cmaidalka

Professional School Counselor

Dickinson, TX

Professional School Counselors are certified professionals that have a highly trained skillset. Chaplains can not replace Professional School Counselors. We would encourage chaplains to work along the side of counselors but not in place of. Our district currently works closely with chaplains and that is a beneficial relationship. Please consider proposing to change the bill to working with school counselors and not performing the duties of school counselors. This would also need to be funded. Thank you

Deborah Guidry, Ms.

self/teacher/school counseling intern

San Antonio, TX

Among other issues, chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance. According to the Texas Model, Guidance is one of the core elements of the school counselor. School counselors must have a background in teaching K-12 for a minimum of 2 years (many would argue they should have more) specifically because they must be able to provide guidance lessons in the classroom to all students at all developmental levels. Chaplains do not have any experience in providing K-12 lessons and therefore would not be able to provide this basic need and expectation of a school counselor, which comprises 1/4 of a school counseling program.

Additionally, responsive services require that a school counselor be able to provide services to students from families of widely diverse backgrounds. Chaplains to have a background in this area through the military; however, to families unfamiliar with the military, they may not understand this and therefore be unwilling to seek services from the school counselor if they are a chaplain, particularly if they are not of the same religious background. Texas has a rich and diverse population in the 21st century; our school counselors should and must reflect this if we are to meet the needs of all families in an equitable manner as required both by the Texas Model and the ASCA Code of Ethics by which school counselors are bound.

Erin Bingham

Self

Spring, TX

This is simply absurd. We have qualified counselors. If the chaplains want to be counselors, they can get the advanced degree.

JoAnn Dono

self as an individual, school counselor for over 15 years, and a licensed mental health professional

Austin, TX

Absolutely against this bill as an individual and even more so as a professional in the field of public education for over 30 years, a school counselor for over 20 years and a mental health professional. First and foremost the US Constitution includes separation of church and state in the Bill of Rights. By replacing school counselors you are undermining the ASCA model as well as the Texas School Counseling model.

Donna Brecht

Self/ Algebra/8th grade Team Lead Math Teacher

Whitney, TX

I am a Veteran and Teacher of mathematics, I am very happy to hear this addition and variety to this position for our youth and staff. I have worked with Chaplains within the military and know that they will be a great positive influence among staff and students. Someone who will value the moral values of our community is needed among our youth. The structure and skills of a chaplain to create a positive environment among soldiers is impressive. I look forward to seeing this position hold more than the carnal world views and include more of the higher guidance thoughts among families and students. Including personal strength of beliefs of moral values is part of the whole of any person. This has been taken out of schools for far too long. The deeper self of our students and families have been ignored far too long. Allowing a community to provide a non scientific Marxist view of counseling as an option is a wonderful variety to the needs of our students and staff.

Debora King, Licensed Professional Counselor

Self

Eastland, TX

While this bill is well intentioned, it clearly shows a lack of understanding of what school counselors do. They are tasked with implementing a guidance curriculum that includes classroom guidance sessions on Social Emotional Learning, crisis intervention, implementing behavioral plans, working with teachers on classroom management skills, helping parents find resources for their children, etc. Sadly, they don't even get to do these things. Instead, they spend their days putting out fires, reacting to the large number of kids who come to school with extreme behavioral issues, attending ARD meetings, doing 504 plans, coding for PEIMS, filing CPS reports, and the biggest time stealer, managing the STAAR program. High school and Middle School counselors also over see career development, graduation plans, scholarships, college applications, and the biggest time stealer of dealing with dual credit. What chaplain is trained to do any of this? Would they even want to? Certified school counselors must have taught. Doing so gives them credence in working with teachers and going into classrooms. School counselors are becoming scarce because they really want to counsel but the demands make it hard. A better bill would be to protect the integrity of counselor's roles, eliminate all testing from their assignments, and develop an accountability system that ensures only a small percentage of time on administrative tasks. I served as a school counselor for 30 years and taught 4 more. This bill feels insulting to those of us who have 48 to 60 graduate hours in counseling and experience in a school setting. Thank you for your time.

Aileen Hays, Coordinator of Student Services

self, licensed clinical social worker

Van Alstyne, TX

I have worked in public schools since 1996 in a variety of capacities. As a social worker, counselor, and mental health professional. The skills and training that counselors and social workers have is not equal to that of chaplains. Chaplains definitely have an important role in our communities, but it is not the same role that a professional school counselor or licensed social worker play. It is not the same areas of expertise. With the significant mental health crises that we are experiencing in Texas public schools, we do not need less qualified people. We need more of the highly qualified people. Please do not move forward with this bill.

Anne Thayer

Self

Austin, TX

First, I am worried that a Chaplain cannot put aside their own religious beliefs in order to help kids of other faiths. But just as important, a Chaplain is not trained to help in all the ways that a professional counselor can. A chaplain just doesn't have the deep background in things like dealing with dyslexia or autism or vocational Ed. Don't know if this is a backdoor to putting religion in schools or just because Texas is cheap when it comes to caring for kids. I am deeply opposed to this bill

Peggy Roscoe

Self

Conroe, TX

I do not support using chaplains to perform the duties of guidance counselors. This is against the separation of church and state, and even though the chaplains may not discuss religious matters, their training remains in doubt. A school counselor has a masters degree and is much better qualified for this position.

Catherine Canning

Self/ teacher

Brownsville, TX

What the heck?? Separation of church and state!!! A chaplain is not trained the same as someone with a counseling degree. Also, as they are living a certain VOCATION, they will obviously have the vocation's biases. No need for ANY BIASES when you are counseling people. You meet them where THEY are!!!

mary katherine raines, retired teacher

none

brownsville, TX

This cannot possibly be legal. A public school enrolls Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and those of other beliefs. It also enrolls atheists and agnostics. We MUST keep one designated religion out of our public schools. If you pass this absurd law, it will be justifiably challenged in court. If a district wants to hire a chaplain, it must guarantee that this individual has received all requisite training to become a school counselor. Please do not even think about passing this absurd legislation.

Joyce Finch

School Counselors

Houston, TX

Ministers and priests should NOT take the place of school counselors. They have not been trained to counsel students and parents. Many times they give wrong advice, and my mother-in-law was giving terrible advice by her priest. What the priest told her to do back fired. As a counselor, you never tell anyone what they have to do; instead, you suggest because they have to go back to their environment and not the counselor.

Meggan Havelka

Self - professional counselor

Lewisville, TX

Please oppose HB 3614. Professional school counselors must have a masters degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program. There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill. Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling. Please oppose HB 3614 when it is heard by the Public Education Committee on Thursday.

Dina Hoffman, School Counselor
self - School Counselor
China Spring, TX

I am currently serving in my thirteenth year as a school counselor in a Texas public school district. Prior to earning the required credentials to become a school counselor, I was a public school teacher for fourteen years. The Texas Education Code (TEC Chapter 33, Subchapter A) specifies the duties of school counselors and outlines components of the school counseling program. Along with that, The Texas model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs provides a more detailed picture of an exemplary school counseling program. I urge you to read these documents before voting on this bill. Understanding the entire scope of the school counselor profession will deter you from allowing anyone without the proper training to step into this very important public school position. Chaplains simply do not have adequate training to do the job.

Additionally, chaplains are trained in theology and pastoral counseling. According to the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics A.4.b, counselors must "avoid imposing their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors" on clients, and "seek training in areas in which they are at risk of imposing their values onto clients, especially when their values are inconsistent with the client's goals or are discriminatory in nature." Chaplains/pastoral counselors are trained to guide clients to seek spiritual answers to their issues. While this is a viable option if a client seeks this type of counseling, in a public school setting this would be a violation of the constitutional guarantee of separation of church and state.

Thank you for allowing me to share my opinion on this issue, and I urge you to make an informed decision when you vote on this bill.

Carrie Dewey, Professional School Counselor

Self

McKinney, TX

Honestly, as a Professional School counselor, this is an insult to our profession for multiple reasons. Furthermore, it indicates a complete lack of awareness regarding what school counselors do and who school counselors serve in Texas schools.

In this bill, a "chaplain" can perform our assigned duties. So who defines a chaplain? Could this be an Imam from the local mosque? A Guru from the local Buddhist temple? We have the largest temple in North America right in Frisco, Texas. If this is pertaining to only Christian Chaplains which denomination? Are we talking about Catholic priests? Methodists ministers? Could they be a married lesbian Methodist minister? Somehow I believe the aforementioned religious leaders would not be included in the chaplain definition. I find this hard to defend since we have had the last several decades of taking religion out of schools. What of our nonchristian families and students? The basic definition of chaplain is:

: a clergyman in charge of a chapel

: a clergyman officially attached to a branch of the military, to an institution, or to a family or court

: a person chosen to conduct religious exercises (as at a meeting of a club or society)

This is completely inappropriate in a public school setting.

Next we can discuss "duties"

Here is what you would need to make sure the chaplains know:

All state-mandated guidance goals and how to teach/deliver them

All state-mandated testing requirements and how to interpret results for all grades

How to work together with school administration and teachers to deliver a comprehensive school counseling program as outlined by the Texas School Counseling Association and state law

How to assess threats to self and others in students grades k - 12

How to guide high school students to successful graduation through planning - including SPED, 504, and EL students. Including GT, dual credit students, college application, funding and planning. Including student-athletes who need to plan courses in compliance with their chosen schools.

How to run small groups with students grades 3- 12 struggling with grief, ADHD, Depression, Anxiety and a whole HOST of other issues preventing school success

Here is the short version of what I just wrote, but honestly that this even reached a vote shows a whole lot of ignorant and narrow-minded thinking.

HB 3614 would allow schools to replace certified school counselors with uncertified chaplains.

- Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program.

- There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill.

Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

- Please oppose HB 3614 when it is heard by the Public Education Committee on Thursday.

Roxanne Faulds, Dr

Very Concerned Parent

Austin, TX

This is a vile and disgusting abuse of parental rights and a violation of the separation of Church and State clause with potentially horrifying consequences in our Texas Public schools. No one should be allowed to set foot in our public schools without a thorough Background Check and Nationally Recognized education, certification, and training to counsel, teach, or otherwise regularly interact with minor children. I strongly oppose HB 3614 and any House Representative in support of it.

Meagan Gaskins

Self - mother

Midland, TX

Chaplains are not qualified / properly trained to replace a school counselor. This will be doing our children and injustice.

Kris Canestorp

Self/School Counselor

Conroe, TX

Chaplains do not have the education to function as school counselors. There is nothing taken into consideration for classroom guidance which is a core component at all levels of the school counselors job. School counselors have a masters degree which sufficiently covers multiple areas of students growth and achievement, in all areas socially emotionally and academically, chaplains do not.

Jo Hawk

Self/School Counselor

Conroe, TX

As a professional school counselor with over 10 years of experience in the public school setting, there is NO way a chaplain has the knowledge or skillset to act as a school counselor. My own personal father is a chaplain. I, myself, have also served in a ministerial setting outside of the public school system. Even with my background, I feel VERY strongly that this is a TERRIBLE idea to employ chaplains as school counselors. We have extensive training and education that we go through as school counselors. We are knowledgeable in the laws you all create (even the ludicrous ones). We are mandated by law to report abuse to keep children safe. We have classroom teaching experience, so we know the pressures teachers face daily. We also maintain a bias free environment to meet the needs of ALL students. How would a chaplain do this? How would a chaplain maintain the ethics code of our professional school counseling organizations? We work with students from ALL walks of life with varying values and belief systems without bringing our personal beliefs into the conversation. How would you guarantee that a chaplain does not only speak to his/her religious values and beliefs? The idea of this bill tells me you all have ZERO knowledge of what a school counselor actually does each day.

Dede Fox

Dede Fox

The Woodlands, TX

Oppose. Chaplains should not be allowed to fulfill the same duties as school counselors— meaning that some parents who do not follow Christian faith traditions may be concerned that their children are being indoctrinated at school. Chaplains do not have the training or expertise of licensed, professional school counselors. Licensed school counselors are trained to provide services to ALL students equitably and must adhere to the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics.

Amanda Edgmon

Self, RN

Tomball, TX

Only counselors who hold an advanced degree in counseling should be employed by schools. Chaplains should remain outside the school doors unless they have the advanced degrees required in psychology AND agree in writing to remain secular when advising and supporting students. There is no shortage of individuals graduating with the required credentials. Additionally, allowing chaplains into the schools only brings the risk of lawsuit of abridging the rights of students to be educated in a manner allowing for the separation of Church and State. If chaplains feel the need to be employed in such a role, there are plenty of church based schools where they can do so. Public schools need to remain secular so all children get the support they require without the bias of religion.

Misti Kelley, Coordinator of High School Counseling Services

Self, professional school counselor

San Antonio, TX

I do not wish to see schools permitted to substitute chaplains for certificated, professional school counselors (PSCs) because

- 1) PSCs have a background in teaching, equipping us with the skills needed to deliver effective classroom guidance lessons. While the topics covered in these lessons are governed by TEA (2018) and outlined in the Texas Model (TEC 33.005), PSCs conduct campus needs assessments to hone in on the exact skills to be addressed in their communities as part of the multi-tiered system of supports. Classroom guidance is a level one support provided at all students. Chaplains do not have the background to support all students in this way.

- 2) because of our background as educators and our familiarity with education systems, PSCs are prepared to advocate for students in all aspects of their academic, emotional, and social growth and well-being. Indeed, advocacy is one of the 10 domains by which we are evaluated per the Texas Evaluation Model for Professional School Counselors, 3rd edition.

- 3) PSCs are required to have a masters degree in counseling and complete a school preparation program. We are also required to pass background checks. There are no similar provisions for chaplains in this bill.

Please consider these points and OPPOSE HB3614 tomorrow.

Dianne Teafatiller

Southside Elementary

Conroe, TX

Greetings Rep. Hefner,

I come to you with major concerns regarding this bill which would approve a Chaplain to replace a School Counselor. I am a Christian but feel that a School Counselor is educationally qualified to serve our school students and has training in all aspects of School Counseling as opposed to others with no requirement to be certified through TEA. I have major concerns regarding this since a Chaplain may push their beliefs on our children which should be done in the church and home to avoid beliefs that are contrary to the families beliefs to our most vulnerable children.

Please reconsider changing to NOT replace the School Counselor who has been a teacher and has a Master's degree in Education in School Counseling and reconsider this HB 3614.

Sincerely,

Dianne Teafatiller

Lead Counselor Southside Elementary

Cleveland, TX

Shelley Craig

Atascocita Presbyterian Church, Retired

Humble, TX

Out of respect for our Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and other faith traditions, I urge you to defeat HB3614. Out of respect for the training of certified clinical counselors who are trained in the field of children's needs for counseling I urge you to defeat HB3614. I speak out of my training as a counselor and pastor that this is a bad idea and unworthy of the very real needs of our children for the best possible counseling.

Sarabeth Haddad

Self- Mental Health Therapist

Houston, TX

I am very concerned that when youth mental health is at an all time high, our legislature is considering replacing trained School Counselors with Chaplains. School Counselors have special training in child and adolescent development, mental health counseling, K-12 educational systems, career counseling, and more related to the social-emotional wellness of children and adolescents. They are trained o how to serve clients from a diversity of religious, ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds. They are bound by a code of ethics that is upheld by state licensing boards and a national organization. They are required to attend schools accredited by a national counseling organization to ensure quality training. They are required to take examinations and complete 3000 hours of supervised practice that ensure thorough understanding of mental health and counseling practice. Counselors are an asset to schools struggling with students who have behavior and mental health symptoms. Many schools wish for more counseling staff and resources and lower counselor to student ratios- not less. While a chaplains can fill important roles in their communities, they are not adequately trained to support student mental health or fulfill the various job duties of school counselors. Moreover, this endorses religion in public ally funded schools and may leave some students and families without someone safe and unbiased they can seek support from. I have served as a school social worker and therapist and have respect for the critical role counselors play in schools. This is misguided and will create huge gaps in mental health and behavioral supports at schools that will lead to long term consequences in the emotional and physical safety of our schools. PLEASE support and increase school counselors- not replace them!

Jennifer Willis, Counselor

Self

Fort Worth, TX

Please do not allow people who are not trained to be counselors act as counselors! Counselors have special skills in working with empathy and trauma that chaplains do not.

Dolores Mitchell

self

Spring, TX

Schools should not have chaplains as counselors. Families who think a chaplain is necessary need to go to their churches - school is not the place for chaplains as they can indoctrinate those who have religious beliefs that are not in line with the family's beliefs . OPPOSE this bill- religion and schools do not go together!!!

Lucy Frost, MS

Self

Manchaca, TX

I strongly oppose this bill. Our kids need qualified professionals counseling them. While some chaplains may be wonderful counselors, others will not be. Without required licensing or certification, there is no way for parents to know the quality of counseling our kids are getting in school. In addition, "chaplain" most often means someone from the Christian religion. In our highly diverse population, with Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, and many other religions represented, as well as families who do not adhere to a religion, this is erasing the line between church and state that the founding fathers knew was important to a thriving democracy. As stated in the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". My belief and understanding is that no gov't agency in the US should make any laws respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." If a child from another faith, for ex, is counseled by a Christian chaplain, to not practice the religion of their family or community, that is prohibiting the free exercise of that religion.

Lisa Wallace
self
Fairview, TX

This bill would permit replacing certified school counselors with uncertified chaplains and this is not acceptable. This would undermine the safety and well-being of all students. School counselors are professions and are trained and licensed to provide critical mental health and academic support services to students. If these professionally trained counselors are replaced by chaplains who lack the same qualifications and expertise, this could put students' mental and emotional health at risk. Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

Also, chaplains' religious beliefs and practices should not be a part of any school system. Their beliefs and practices may not align with all students and could create an uncomfortable environment for the student which is completely unacceptable.

Students deserve access to qualified and impartial professionals who can provide comprehensive and evidence-based support. House Bill 3614 jeopardizes this crucial aspect of education and should be soundly rejected.

Kendra Arevalo
Self, School Counselor
Laguna Vista, TX

This is a ridiculous bill that shouldn't even be slightly considered. School counselors have gone through the process of obtaining their Master's degrees, a process that required numerous hours and thousands of dollars. Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance. This would create so many problems for our schools. It also minimizes the work that school counselors do. It's a slap in the face to all of us who worked so hard to reach this level.

LaShonda Willis, Dr.
Self
Houston, TX

Hello,
this proposal is very hideous. It is a conflict of interest; we can not allow prayer, but we can have chaplains. That does not make sense! This is an insult to all counselors, who went to school, paid their way to obtain licenses, meet other criteria's in self development to be a counselor and or assist in duties as a certified counselor to a person who does not have to nothing at a counselors expense! Besides being a general counselor duties, counselors has to administer state test. To administer test, you have to be certified. That means less support on the campuses. We hear about chaplains raping little boys all the time! I definitely wouldn't want my son around petrifies such as chaplains on his campus daily! Who made this dumb proposal?

Julie Armstrong
Self/School Counselor
Copperas Cove, TX

I respectfully submit that chaplains do not hold the special qualifications to address and support the mental health and academic needs of the students in the state of Texas. School counselors acquire special training and certifications to perform their duties. I do admit that chaplains could support the faith journey and moral development of students; however, school counselors can also provide moral development through character education and guidance lessons. School counselors provide for the whole child. Please vote no to this bill.

Carol Ortiz
self/retired
Montgomery, TX

I strongly OPPOSE HB 3614. I am a tax paying voter against children being religiously indoctrinated at public school. Chaplains, payed with our taxes, shouldn't be hired to fulfill the same duties as school counselors. Parents who do not follow Christian faith, or have objections to general faith-related traditions have the right to object if their children are being indoctrinated at school. Chaplains lack the training and expertise of licensed, professional school counselors. Licensed school counselors are trained to provide services to ALL students, regardless of their faith, in accordance with the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics. This bill proposes a serious breach of the freedom from mandated religion in public institutions supported by the tax payers.

Jessica Morgan, LPC
Sam Houston Chapter of the Texas Association for Play Therapy
Stafford, TX

It is important to understand that school counselors, similar to Licensed Professional Counselors, pursue higher education to ensure the ethical and safe practice of counseling services in a school setting. It is disheartening to see the role devalued further. Presently, school counselors are serviced to provide services that are not mental health services (e.g. lunch duty, testing, etc). It would be important to look at this role as means to provide mental health services again. Additionally, chaplains are not clinically trained in the mental health field. Specifically, a spiritual role could be sought if children choose and decide to seek this, however, mental health services should be separate and away from the chaplain role. We choose to seek services of specializations such as cardiologists or orthopedic surgeons but would not seek the services of a chaplain in these areas. Similarly, we would not seek a chaplain for mental health services. Thank you for your time. Kind regards.

Sara Eddy, LPC
Self, LPC
Lake Jackson, TX

The professional school counselor's role continues to require clarification when left to administrator's, stakeholders, and representatives discretion. As a professional school counselor and currently in the role as a licensed professional counselor in a Texas high school, I would like to offer some thoughts and concerns regarding the proposal of chaplains working as school counselors. School Counselors engage in a variety of ways and have been trained within the context of school systems which may look very different from a clinical or a religious lens.

Does the chaplain know about graduation requirements? Are they versed in psychological theory, career counseling and equipped to provide comprehensive lesson plans to meet the social and emotional needs of today's students? Who would train a chaplain to fulfill the comprehensive role of a school counselor and ensure they are following the ethical guidelines that are maintained in our profession? What skills would the chaplain bring to the table to replicate a school counselor?

The School Counselor certificate plan requires a minimum of 48 Master's level hours, a passing score on the state assessment and two years of successful teaching.

As I am trying to understand what a chaplain would do in place of a school counselor, I am confused looking at the definition of what a chaplain is and knowing the job of a professional school counselor. Professional school counselors follow a code of ethics that includes putting aside our own personal beliefs when working with students, especially since we serve students of many different belief systems, including the choice not to have one. Chaplains by definition are serving students through their religious beliefs. When looking at services given by both, it appears the school chaplain would be closer to a role of a school social worker. The school chaplain's role is one of well-being support. The professional school counselor is more of a bridge between social/emotional learning and academic success. Professional school counselors are trained specifically to assist with academic success while developing the whole child. They are also trained in more serious and complex issues such as alcohol and drug abuse, sexuality, self-harm and suicide, academic achievement, and student exposure to violence, racism, and neglect. The education and training of school counselors are specifically geared to enhancing the school system. The education and training for a chaplain are founded in their faith and religious guidelines. Assuming the role of chaplain is identical to that of a school counselor is greatly oversimplifying what a professional school counselor does.

This metaphor summarizes some of my concerns: "Your child has appendicitis. If given a choice between an unqualified but very empathetic and dedicated first-aider, and a fully qualified doctor, who would you choose to operate on your child?"

Thank you in advance for considering my concerns.

Norma Fitzgerald
Self
Harlingen, TX

I disagree with this bill. It is a clear violation of church and state. School counselors receive specific training and education to do their jobs. They also have to pass a certification exam. Chaplains do not have that training.

Dianne Teafatiller
Southside Elementary
Cleveland, TX

Dear Public Education Committee,

I am writing today to voice my concerns regarding HB 3614. As a Christian School Counselor, I appreciate the fact of having a spiritual person on campus to guide our students; however, I am very concerned about hiring a Chaplain “instead of a school counselor.” School Counselors are certified educators and have not only been through the training to work with student needs. School Counselors are specialists in meeting the needs of students from PK-12th grade and are available to help in crisis situations, as well as provide individual and group counseling and hold a Masters degree in Education in School Counseling.

My concern is that we would replace the school counselor with a Chaplain who has no educational experience nor follows the standards that School Counselors follow.

Please stop this bill. School Counselors provide a safe place for students and are not there to impose religious beliefs on our most vulnerable. Parents should have the right to enforce spiritual beliefs as they choose and not as the school deems appropriate from a chaplain who may hold a faith that is contrary to the family’s core beliefs.

Thank you for your service as you promote what is best for our children.

Sincerely,

Dianne Teafatiller

Lori Adamczyk
Self
Spring, TX

I oppose this bill. Counselors need to be professionally trained to work with all students. Chaplains from one religion are not appropriate given the religious diversity in our public schools.

Russica Allen
Self - Home building
Farmers Branch, TX

Separation of church and state. Our children deserve guidance counseling of their future from someone in education, not a clergyman who will pass judgement on them if they do not attend church, or chose other religions than Christian.

Sandi Hebley, RN, LMSW
Self
Dallas, TX

Please vote NO on this bills. Trained counselors provide an essential function in our schools. Chaplains do not necessarily have that training and might well bring their own religious agenda to the job, not respecting the beliefs and traditions of the students. Our kids deserve trained counselors in these traumatic times!

Erica Ramirez
Director of Research
San Antonio, TX

I am writing in support of HB 3614, which will allow licensed chaplains to serve in schools, in similar function to school counselors. I am a PhD in sociology of religion and it is my professional opinion that chaplains represent a ready workforce of trained and skilled agents of human care. Chaplains are already able to function in secular arenas, like hospitals, so they are primed and trained to serve a public population in schools.

We simply need to meet the very pressing mental health needs of our student populations and I am certain that chaplains can help us do so-- there are really not enough mental health professionals to meet our needs. By working together, chaplains and therapists can assist a broader array of students and identify which of them will need greater psychological or even psychiatric interventions.

Rhenda Gray
Self
Fort Worth, TX

I am completely against HB 3614, which would let schools replace their Professional School Counselors with chaplains.

This is a blatant abuse of religious freedom and separation of church and state. Our schools are supported by our state taxes.

In addition, this is an active act of forcing specific religious beliefs on students in public education. These people have no training for dealing with today's students and their unique learning situations.

This bill would dismiss the years of training and experience professional counselors offer and instead allow uncertified chaplains to do their job.

It is a disgusting and vile attempt again of the religious right to take over and force their outmoded, outdated, horrifying, and hateful beliefs on children.

Please do NOT vote in favor in of HB 3614.

Lauren Newton, Dr.
Self, retired school principal
Austin, TX

Students are in psychological crisis, now more than ever. They need and deserve **QUALIFIED, TRAINED COUNSELORS** who are not affiliated with any religious group.

MELONY CANDLER, LPC

SELF, LICENSED PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR AND CERTIFIED SCHOOL COUNSELOR

SUGAR LAND, TX

As a former school counselor and mental health professional licensed to provide services, I contend that hiring chaplains to do the jobs that educated and licensed professionals are needed for is completely inappropriate. I received this information from the Texas Counseling Association, of which I am a member, about this House Bill, and I wondered why the state would bring in someone other than licensed professionals to work in school based counseling.

I worked as a school counselor for some time with K-12, and knowing the challenges one faces as a school counselor, I have my thoughts about hiring people that are not certified to provide school based care.

Licensed individuals are specifically educated on delivery of psychological and educational delivery of a school based program, and professionals receive on-going training on different treatment modalities for therapy, creating school based service programs and implementing them school wide, handling crises in schools, as well as daily counseling services, and a whole host of other duties that vary by school campus, such as testing, participation in multidisciplinary assessment teams, and RTI consultation. School counselors are trained professionals that apply researched based approaches to implement effective integrated model of school consultation (interactions w. other professionals and problem solving) methods in schools which goes far beyond therapy sessions.

Chaplains are not trained for this. I would also add the following:

Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program.

There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill.

Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

Please oppose HB 3614 when it is heard by the Public Education Committee on Thursday.

Thank you for your time,

Melony Candler

Lisa Stone

self/educator

HOUSTON, TX

Texas students deserve to enjoy true religious freedom at public school without being forced to learn according to the religious right's belief system.

I join all those who say NO to HB 3614!

William Gross

Texans

Houston, TX

Chaplains can not replace the work that counselors perform in schools. It's a clear violation of the separation of church and State. Additionally, the track record of the Catholic Church should preclude all clergy from any contact with anyone especially children.

Kaitlyn Ames

Self, artist

Mesquite, TX

This bill is contradictory to what we know about mental health. I respect religious freedom, as it is foundational to our country—that being said, you cannot force Christianity on a child seeking mental help. They need a licensed counselor that is professionally trained to give the student the support they desperately need. It would be a GREAT disservice to our children to replace guidance counselors with religious figures.

Ashley Carrasco
Texas freedom network
Richmond, TX

As a Texas resident I am OPPOSED to this bill. Students should have access to trained, qualified, and certified counselors. Allowing chaplains is against our freedom of religion.

Wilner Jeudy, Dr.
American Atheists
Houston, TX

I am a primary care physician in the Houston area. To allow this to happen locally, much less state-wide, will be dangerous and unwise. You cannot allow untrained people to steer children and adolescents on their path to mental wellness. I urge you to vote no to this bill on 20Apr2023.

Rachel McCune
Fort Bend ISD
Richmond, TX

I strongly oppose this bill being passed. I am a professional school counselor that has to have a masters degree in school counseling in order to support our students. I have had to complete a school counseling program, internship and had to pass a state test in order to receive my credentials to do the job that I do. I have done research on mental health and have the tools necessary to support our students/parents/community and staff during the current mental health crisis we are in. This role requires providing classroom guidance lessons so that we can continue to be proactive and raise awareness for our students. A chaplin simply won't suffice, and I find it sad that because of the budget constraints we would even consider this.

Elizabeth Cottongame, Mrs
Self
Fort Worth, TX

I'm a long standing member, over 30 years, of a Methodist church. My children have been educated in public schools. Children need counselors, not chaplains. Our country was formed on separation of church and state. If children need chaplains counseling them church is the appropriate place, not school. You're wasting taxpayer money even submitting this bill.

Jim Neal
Self
Nacogdoches, TX

I oppose this bill. We need trained counselors in schools.

Claire Coleman
self
Dallas, TX

Texas students deserve to enjoy true religious freedom at public school without being forced to learn according to the religious right's belief system. This bill would dismiss the years of training and experience counselors have and instead allow uncertified chaplains to do their job. It would also be a blatant violation of religious freedom, pushing a chaplain's individual religious beliefs on public school students who have varied faiths and cultural practices. It would especially harm LGBTQIA+ students who deserve a trained, accepting counselor to talk to — not a chaplain who may put personal beliefs above their needs. Let's tell our legislators: We say NO to HB 3614!

Tara Cummings, Dr.

Self, psychologist

Cypress, TX

I am writing to oppose HB 3614, which would allow religious chaplains to serve as school counselors without oversight by any educational or mental health governing body. As a multi-licensed mental health clinician, I understand deeply the need for such in order to protect the public - in this case, our children.

Christian Nationalist extremists have told us endlessly that they believe children are being groomed and abused in our schools.

I specialize in the treatment of sexual trauma, and here's a something that we know...

One of the primary groups of child sexual predators include clergy, church staff, and church lay leaders. Back in 2014, a Cypress family sued Second Baptist and Community of Faith for the sexual assault of their 12 y/o by a youth pastor.

Do you know where that pastor initially met that child? In my own children's school district, CFISD, where he was a mentor and very literally groomed her into joining his congregation, whereafter he sexually abused her. ?

If parents want their children counseled by a religious chaplain, they can take them to church. Otherwise, we will trust the expertise and credentialing of our outstanding school counselors.

Sheri Allen, Cantor

Makom Shelanu Congregation

FT WORTH, TX

I am a Cantor (Jewish Clergy), serving Makom Shelanu Congregation in Ft. Worth. I am also a Chaplain, and have worked both in hospitals and in hospice. And i vehemently object to having chaplains replace school counselors. It is unacceptable on so many levels. First of all, this is a blatant violation of the separation of church and state. Additionally, the role of a chaplain is to provide spiritual care to those who need and request it. Most chaplains have no formal training or certification when it comes to working with students, and are unequipped to deal with the issues they would face in a school setting - including mental health challenges. This legislation would actively harm children by not giving them access to qualified professionals in a place where, and at a time when, they arguably need them more than ever. I am also assuming that these chaplains would come from the Christian community, and would make many students of other faiths (or no faith) very uncomfortable and apprehensive. Even if the chaplains are prohibited from evangelizing in the public schools, their very presence sends the message would send a strong message that mental health problems can be solved with a good does of spirituality - and only a specific version of what that looks like. There are so many ways that students can experience trauma in school. Please, do not let the passage of this bill be one of them. Please vote no on HB 3614.

Salma Valadez

Self

Helotes, TX

Unqualified individuals replacing those who have dedicated years to pursuing and completing degree(s) in higher education would be detrimental to the children that lawmakers claim to so badly strive to protect. It is absurd that anyone would think that someone with absolutely no proper education nor skills in psychology and counseling should be allowed to hold the same responsibilities that take years of learning and training to attain. Allowing this bill to pass would be a direct infringement on the religious freedom of students and greatly reduce safe spaces in schools - which are greatly lacking to begin with. Christians are not the only religion that exists in the state of Texas and, as a result, Christian belief systems are certainly not the only ones held by Texans. Replacing licensed professionals with chaplains who are inexperienced in counseling and psychology is slap in the face to Texans, anyone who has or is taking the time and money to pursue a higher education in psychology and counseling, and especially to the children who will no longer have proper, safe, and professional resources to aid them in their mental health journeys. Often times school counselors are the only safe spaces for marginalized students, especially LGBTQ+ students and students of color. For the state of Texas to even propose a bill that would take this resource away is embarrassing and completely nonsensical. The students and school systems of Texas and licensed professionals of Texas deserve more dignity, respect, and value as human beings.

marybelle suczek, Dr.
self, a teacher and parent
South Padre Island, TX

Chaplains, by their training and experience, tend to see Faith, whatever their particular faith may be, as the answer to every problem. Professional counselors recognize that a clients faith may be an important part of a solution, but they also are trained to help students discover different ways to approach a problem, and to choose what is right for them. They counsel, not proselytize. In the educational setting it is totally inappropriate to substitute chaplains for appropriately trained counselors. Students are certainly free to consult their pastors, priests or imans, or whatever religious leader they choose, but religious leaders should not replace counselors in schools.

Karen Nicholson
Self, retired educator
Austin, TX

Public school students need trained professional counselors, not chaplains, to address the many complex challenges they encounter.

Angelica Walls, School Counselor
Self
Harlingen, TX

I'm against this house bill. They don't have the school counseling preparation to provide services in a school.

Marissa Curtis Gough
Self
Austin, TX

As a parent of elementary school aged children, I oppose this bill. Currently school counselors must have a Master's degree. What training will these chaplains have? Religious leaders do not belong on public schools.

Kristy Oliver Jones
Self; Parent and small business owner
Round Rock, TX

Chaplains have no place in public schools. They do not have the appropriate training, and by putting them in public schools, the State is endorsing and promoting specific religious beliefs. If a family wants to pursue spiritual guidance for their children, they can get that from any of the numerous churches, synagogues, and temples in their communities. The state education budget does not need to be allocated to anyone in a position to push any religious agenda onto kids who may believe something very different.

Janet Love, Rev.
self, Psychotherapist, Minister
Austin, TX

HB 3614, which would let schools replace their Professional School Counselors with untrained chaplains, is up in the public education committee tomorrow, April 20.

Please vote against HB 3614. I have had training and experience in Ministry and Counseling, and in no way are the knowledge and skills of a Chaplain a replacement for a Certified School Counselor. School counselors are required to be trained as Certified Educators and have 2 years experience in the classroom, as well as Master's Degrees focused on human development and mental health. This bill would dismiss the years of training and experience counselors have and instead allow uncertified chaplains to do their job. It would also be a blatant violation of religious freedom, pushing a chaplain's individual religious beliefs on public school students who have varied faiths and cultural practices. It would especially harm LGBTQIA+ students who deserve a trained, accepting counselor to talk to — not a chaplain who may put personal beliefs above their needs.

Liz Clearman

Self, freelance copy editor/copywriter (have a J.D.)

Houston, TX

I am writing to vehemently express my disdain and disappointment that HB 3614 is a legitimate bill being proposed. I feel as though Republicans have truly lost their collective minds attempting to push blatantly obvious Christian nationalist/dominionist bills that are slowly eking out any semblance of separation of church and state. You are truly proposing to replace professional school counselors - who have degrees, certifications, and special training in order to counsel (key word) public schoolchildren - in favor of religious chaplains? I'm not sure if you're aware of this, but public schools house and educate more than just Christians (it's shocking, isn't it?). We have all faiths and religions in this state, and as much as you might not want to admit it, you cannot force your religion on others. Religious chaplains are in no way prepared or trained to counsel children. Public schools are not the place for religious indoctrination. Public schools are PUBLIC - open to everyone - and the legislature cannot and should not dictate any type of religion in schools.

Not to mention, this is an incredibly dangerous proposition. I cannot count the number of times I have read about religious leaders in this state and beyond who have been accused and convicted of molestation and sexual abuse of minors. As I mentioned before, the danger also lies in propagating one religion - Christianity - over all of the other religions that exist. If you want your child to be counseled by clergy, take them to a private, religious school, or take them to church. You are also inviting an agenda to be pushed onto LGBTQIA+ kids who might just want someone to talk to, not knowing they're going to be preached to about their sexuality/gender. As a taxpayer and a parent in SBISD who has an LGBTQIA+ child - and funny enough, someone who is a "Christian," although I am extremely reticent to associate myself with any of y'all anymore - I am sick and tired of a Christian nationalist agenda being pushed in our schools and in the public. Enough. ENOUGH.

It seems that while many of you enjoy citing the Constitution for the much-beloved Second Amendment (especially in this state), you seem to conveniently forget the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. Let me remind you what it says: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." PERIOD. And lest y'all have also forgotten, that applies to the territories and states of this union, INCLUDING TEXAS. Representative Hefner, you are BLATANTLY disrespecting anyone who doesn't practice Christianity, the public schools of this state, school counselors who have specialized training in their fields, and the Constitution.

Texas has become an embarrassment, and I'm quite sure that the public education committee will be hearing from me again because of the astoundingly anti-public education bills that are on the docket this session. If it wasn't crystal clear, I am 100% opposed to this bill.

Elizabeth Paulette

Retired

New Braunfels, TX

I strongly support this bill that will allow chaplains to perform the duties of school counselors. Today, we are experiencing an increase in violence towards catholic and public schools alike. Having a chaplain will allow for more personnel to be available to provide services to students. Our society has this social contagion with "youth violence" and "gender dysphoria", so having chaplains at schools will help tremendously in offering help to our state's youth. We need to help these students at school before they become adults. Young children are being bombarded with social media negatives all the time, so it is up to us be available to them and help. Please approve chaplains at public schools this is a matter of saving our Texas youth.

Diana Garcia

Self

Buda, TX

This bill would dismiss the years of training and experience counselors have and instead allow uncertified chaplains to do their job. It would also be a blatant violation of religious freedom, pushing a chaplain's individual religious beliefs on public school students who have varied faiths and cultural practices. It would especially harm LGBTQIA+ students who deserve a trained, accepting counselor to talk to — not a chaplain who may put personal beliefs above their needs.

Ann Leoni, Ms.

self

The Woodlands, TX

A school counselor should not be overtly affiliated with any religion or religious organization. If a counselor has religious beliefs they should keep them to themselves in order to serve the students at large. Being a chaplain should not be considered an alternative to a licensed counselor who has been accredited for public schools.

Sara Hudson

Self, Human Resources manager

Spring, TX

I am so horrified by this, I don't even know where to begin. If I'm being charitable, I can imagine that you know how strapped schools are for professional resources, and that we are in desperate need of more counselors in our schools across the state. But allowing untrained laypeople access to the most vulnerable of our society is the opposite of helpful, especially when there is plentiful evidence demonstrating how some people in the church groom and abuse children for years. Of course it's not all of them, but there's enough that everything about this makes me scared to send my child to school if this passes.

What happens when a child who isn't CIS/straight or has two moms is having a crisis, will they be told they're going to hell? What happens when a Muslim child needs help, and their beliefs aren't aligned with the chaplain? I'm sure there is value in religious counseling, but that should be up to a household to seek out on their own to be sure they find someone who aligns with their beliefs.

Resources available at school should be secular and inclusive in every possible way. If you want to help schools in this capacity, let's stop spending money on so many standardized tests, and use that money to hire more counselors. This is not the way. We must protect the separation of church and state at all costs, because religion belongs at home and not at school.

Toni Wing-Jenkins

self

Burleson, TX

I am writing as a retired Texas educator, mother of a Texas teacher, and grandmother to Texas students.

For the sake of our state's future Texans, please do not support HB 3614. Our students deserve fully paid, fulltime, fully certified school counselors. These individuals have dedicated their education and lives to the betterment of Texas students. They are prepared to meet the varying needs and demands of these young people and children. In a time when we are facing record violence, drug deaths, depression and suicide among our youth, young Texans are in need of increased professional help at school, not kindness and prayers. Chaplains are welcome to work through community churches, perhaps opening counseling and support services through those institutions. But our schools deserve better, much, much better. Increase pay for school counselors. Increase the numbers of counselors in each school. Increase the amount of time school counselors have to meet with students, releasing them from administrative and testing demands. But please do not replace them with untrained, uncertified volunteers.

Thank you,

Toni Wing-Jenkins

Burleson

Anna Gosling

Self/Technical Writer

Plano, TX

Religious freedom and separation of church and state are cornerstones of our democracy. Chaplains have zero business in our public schools. Please do not pass this bill that makes it that more restrictive on students who are atheists, non-christians, pagans, etc., when this bill is an obvious attempt to push christianity on students in times of crisis. Thank you.

Cyral Miller, Mrs.

self

Austin, TX

My heavens, what an awful idea! School counselors are trained professionals with knowledge and expertise in supporting student learning. Although often overwhelmed by large caseloads, counselors help students make life decisions for their academic futures and often are the gateway to needed resources outside of school. Let's get more trained professionals into the schools to solve that problem. Putting religious staff in this position is a gross violation of religious freedom, forcing religious beliefs on public school students with varied faiths and cultural practices, or no formal religious leanings. **IT IS NOT THE PLACE OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOL TO SPREAD RELIGIOUS GOSPEL!** Students need (more) trained, competent school-based counselors, not chaplains. VOTE NO on HB 3614.

Kristin Warthen, Reverend

Self/Clergy

Arlington, TX

I am a United Methodist Pastor, Certified Educator, and Mental Health First Aider writing to urge you to vote NO to HB3614.

As both a certified Texas educator and a pastor, I cannot stand against this bill enough.

This bill violates the separation of church and state and devalues the training and certification of mental health professionals in school districts which are already in short supply. Beyond this, the bill fails to recognize the difference between mental health care and spiritual healthcare. Mental healthcare cares not for faith tradition or background, it addresses student mental health and well-being both in general and in acute situations. This involves students who may be experiencing depression, anxiety, mood disorders, even personality disorders. Chaplains are not trained in mental healthcare. Chaplains train in spiritual well-being and health, which necessarily involves faith, be it Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, etc.

Let me be clear: spiritual health and mental health are not interchangeable and neither are the professionals practicing in those fields. It would be a detriment to students who need a counselor trained to address mental health and well-being concerns to enter an office with a chaplain who might guide them instead in a prayer or a spiritual practice.

The first rule in Mental Health First Aid for religious leaders is this: "Stay in your lane!" That is, we first instruct faithful leaders in the church to avoid prescribing a spiritual solution to a mental well-being concern. We care for the concern at hand. Chaplains do not receive the education needed to properly address the concerns that may come to a school counselor's office.

Passing this legislation will actively do harm to students. Please--for the sake of our children's mental health and well-being-- vote NO to HB3614.

Thank you,

Rev. Kristin N. Warthen

St. Andrew's United Methodist Church

Theresa S Neman, Mrs.

Self educator

Spring, TX

What happened to separation of church and state. Are we going to employ chaplains of every faith? What qualifications will they have to meet? Teachers and counselors require lengthy training. Why not fund actual counselors?

Karen Conyngham, Mrs.

self

Austin, TX

Please reject HB 3614!

The bill would dismiss the years of training and experience counselors have and instead allow uncertified chaplains to do their job. It would also be a blatant violation of religious freedom, pushing a chaplain's individual religious beliefs on public school students who have varied faiths and cultural practices. It would especially harm LGBTQIA+ students who deserve a trained, accepting counselor to talk to — not a chaplain who may put personal beliefs above their needs.

Thank you.

Karen Conyngham

Rachel Zoch, Ms.

Self

Deer Park, TX

I oppose HB 3614, which would let schools replace professional school counselors with untrained chaplains. This bill would dismiss the years of training and experience counselors have and instead allow uncertified chaplains to do their job. It would also be a blatant violation of religious freedom of the millions of Texas public school students who have varied faiths and practices.

Brenda Ivonne Arzate

Texas Freedom Network

Channelview, TX

I am opposed to this bill. Students need access to trained professionals, that went to school to be actual counselors; not chaplains. Chaplains are not trained how counselors are in matters of mental illness and signs of abuse. Not every child is religious, so why have someone affiliated with religious practices in school supposedly counselling children. It is against the freedom of religion.

Amanda Reed

Self

Austin, TX

As a Christian myself who loves the presence that a chaplain can have in a hospital setting or alongside a sports team, I feel strongly that school counselors should be qualified, licensed and appropriately educated professionals who are equipped to handle all that kids face today with mental health, trauma, and other behavioral issues, not chaplains.

Allie Stevenson

Self Teacher

Austin, TX

Religious officials do not belong in public schools. This is completely inappropriate. Chaplains do not have a standard and reasonable training process they go through to work with at risk young people . We need more social workers and school counselors who have undergone the appropriate training to work with at risk youth. Students need highly trained adults who can help them without the judgement that religion often entails. I have been a public teacher for 15 years and we are encouraged to not share our personal religious beliefs with children. I agree with this policy and can't believe that this bill is under consideration. Not to mention I worry about the type of clergy who would consider these positions. The church environment has historically been a source of sexual abuse and to bring some of these church officials into a school environment is a recipe for disaster. Vote no for this bill!

Agustin Lozada

Self

Cypress, TX

The American constitution is strict with separation of church and state and this should be respected. The employment of chaplains as school counselors is not a good idea as this is forbidden by the constitution. Also there are a lot of religion that can be not acceptable to other faith as the proposed bill is tilted towards to evangelical Christian only. This will be not fair to others who are Buddhist, Jewish, Muslims, Satanists or even atheists. Putting religion to public education is like what the Talibans are implementing in Afghanistan which this great country spent years and resources and failed. If we do this here in Texas, then we really send a message to the Talibans that their similar ideals of imposing religion in all aspects of public education is the right thing to do.

To the author of the HB, iban asking you to withdraw this bill and instead support the public education by keeping it fair and accessible to all Texans.

Jane Weatherford

Myself- retired teacher

Spring, TX

If the chaplains are certified counselors, that is not an issue. But if they are not, how can the school hire them to perform the duties of certified counselors?

In public schools, only certified teachers and administrators fill teaching and admin positions

I am a Christian, but a number of my students were from other faith traditions. It seems that a chaplain whose training has been primarily in spiritual guidance would be possibly blurring the separation of church and state.

Melissa Endicott, Dr

Parent

Houston, TX

This bill is simply not appropriate. Not only are pastors not trained as counselors, not all children are going to be their religion. The religious slant they will likely provide when counseling could be very damaging to some children. This is absolutely not the place for untrained staff. Our schools are secular for a reason. I do not want my child counseled by a religious pastor who would impose their religious teachings on my child. Additionally church's don't have a great track record on child sexual abuse. I do not want pastors in my schools

Virginia Gunn

Myself as a parent of three children in public schools.

Houston, TX

This is an attempt to Christianize our public schools. HB 3614 proposes replacing school counselors with chaplains. This is an awful and dangerous idea for multiple reasons, including the very obvious pushing of Christian nationalism, ignoring the separation of church and state, not respecting anyone else's religion, absolutely ZERO training in the specialized field of child psychology, and the very real potential for harm to LGBTQIA+ kids.

Jackie Vincent

Self - analyst

Houston, TX

As a non-Christian, non-religious constituent who's child utilizes our local public school, I have serious concerns about allowing schools to utilize public tax money to employ a religious individual in my child's school. If my child ever needs the services of a counselor, I don't want them to have any fear about going to this person and what they might say to them. What if my child ends up being LGBTQ? You couldn't guarantee that a chaplain would be able to assist without religion clouding their judgement. A counselor is supposed to be a safe space in the school, not someone who could be judging my child or pushing them toward religion. We make a choice in our household to not be religious and a chaplain as school counselor would undermine our decisions as parents in this matter. If other families want the services of a religious counselor, they can access those services at their place of worship or put their child in a parochial school

Kelsey Mullins

Self, manufacturing technician

Pearland, TX

Parents who want their children to receive specialized religious education and counseling have the option to enroll their children in a private religious school or additional faith based programs like Sunday school. There is no reason for a clergy member to work in a public school without the appropriate licensure for that role so long as there is separation between church and state. Chaplains are trained as chaplains, and school counselors, and this practice removes the parent's right to determine what faith they raise their child in by giving members of the clergy license to give faith based counseling in public schools. When chaplains work in other settings, such as hospitals, individuals and families have the ability to request services from the chaplain or decline them as they see fit. Even if parents are allowed to deny their child permission to see the chaplain on the grounds of religious opposition, it is not fair to students or parents to have to choose between spiritual counseling or nothing. School counselors play critical roles in our schools and students deserve trained and credentialed counselors. Faith based counseling is not right for all students and families.

S E Williams

Self

Stafford, TX

This bill, HB 3614, would dismiss the years of training and experience counselors have and instead allow uncertified chaplains to do their job. It would also be a blatant violation of religious freedom, pushing a chaplain's individual religious beliefs on public school students who have varied faiths and cultural practices. It would especially harm LGBTQIA+ students who deserve a trained, accepting counselor to talk to — not a chaplain who may put personal beliefs above their needs. This bill is explicitly a direct violation of the First Amendment of the US Constitution. No government entity at any level may force any religion on any citizen!

K Hammon

Taxpayers

Houston, TX

This bill dismisses the years of training and experience counselors have and instead allows uncertified chaplains to do the job. It would also be a blatant violation of religious freedom, pushing a chaplain's individual religious beliefs on public school students who have varied faiths and cultural practices. It would especially harm LGBTQIA+ students who deserve a trained, accepting counselor to talk to — not a chaplain who may put personal beliefs above their needs. It also provides no value to non religious students. Students need academic guidance, not religious indoctrination. Do not support this bill.

Regina Gutierrez-Garcia

Self

Houston, TX

I am writing as a parent of an elementary school aged child to vote NO to HB 3614.

This bill is negates the vary sanctity of separation of church and state by placing a person of a specific faith in an advisory role for children all across the state.

This bill couldn't be further from religious freedom and will be a disservice to children who need educational advisement.

A public school's place is to educate children in reading, writing and arithmetic NOT religion! Faith is personal and should be introduced by parents. THIS IS PARENT CHOICE!

Please represent me, an extremely concerned parent and DO NOT allow this harmful bill to succeed.

Adriano Garcia

Self

Houston, TX

I am writing as a parent of an elementary school aged child to vote NO to HB 3614.

This bill is negates the vary sanctity of separation of church and state by placing a person of a specific faith in an advisory role for children all across the state.

This bill couldn't be further from religious freedom and will be a disservice to children who need educational advisement.

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Please represent me, an extremely concerned parent and DO NOT allow this harmful bill to succeed.

Gena Anderson, Reverend
Self, United Methodist minister
Arlington, TX

I am a United Methodist Pastor, an AISD substitute teacher , and Mental Health First Aider writing to urge you to vote NO to HB3614.

As both a certified Texas educator and a pastor, I cannot stand against this bill enough.

This bill violates the separation of church and state and devalues the training and certification of mental health professionals in school districts which are already in short supply. Beyond this, the bill fails to recognize the difference between mental health care and spiritual healthcare. Mental healthcare cares not for faith tradition or background, it addresses student mental health and well-being both in general and in acute situations. This involves students who may be experiencing depression, anxiety, mood disorders, even personality disorders. Chaplains are not trained in mental healthcare. Chaplains train in spiritual well-being and health, which necessarily involves faith, be it Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, etc.

Let me be clear: spiritual health and mental health are not interchangeable and neither are the professionals practicing in those fields. It would be a detriment to students who need a counselor trained to address mental health and well-being concerns to enter an office with a chaplain who might guide them instead in a prayer or a spiritual practice.

The first rule in Mental Health First Aid for religious leaders is this: "Stay in your lane!" That is, we first instruct faithful leaders in the church to avoid prescribing a spiritual solution to a mental well-being concern. We care for the concern at hand. Chaplains do not receive the education needed to properly address the concerns that may come to a school counselor's office.

Passing this legislation will actively do harm to students. Please--for the sake of our children's mental health and well-being-- vote NO to HB3614.

Thank you,
Rev. Gena Anderson

Angela Wall
Self
HOUSTON, TX

This is absolutely ridiculous. I do not support this bill.

Kasey McKee
Self, social worker
RICHARDSON, TX

For 3614, I am against chaplains serving as school counselors and suggest expanding access to mental health services by trained professionals

Judith Williams

self

Bedford, TX

Public Education Committee: Vote no HB 3614

I am a Texan and a religious person, and I strongly object to having chaplains replace school counselors. It is just plain wrong for so many reasons, and it is a violation of the separation of church and state.

First, the roles of chaplain and counselor are different. A chaplain provides spiritual care to people who request it and need it. Chaplains may have training in their specific religion, but most do not have formal training or certification in working with students, and are not equipped to deal with the issues and mental health challenges which arise in a school setting. This legislation will harm children because it will not give them access to qualified professionals when they need it most.

Will most of these chaplains be Christian? If so, what type of Christian? There are so many sects! What happens to the child when the chaplain comes from a different religion from their own? Even among Christians there are significant differences – must a Protestant be forced to be counseled by a Catholic chaplain whose very allegiance is to the Catholic church? Or will a Catholic child be counseled by an evangelical chaplain whose tradition scorns the Pope? Will a student be counseled by a chaplain whose faith believes that those with a different style of baptism will not be eligible for salvation?

Even if there's a rule that forbids chaplains to evangelize, their very presence in the school as counselors sends the message that mental health issues can be solved with religion, and especially the "right" religion of the chaplain.

Will the education committee be prepared to provide appropriate chaplains for Jewish, Moslem (Sunni and Shia), Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, students? What about students with no religion, whose parents have raised them in a nonreligious tradition? Spirituality is important. That's why we keep the very important role of chaplains separate from the different but also important role of school counselors.

This bad bill will be just one more source of trauma for students in school.

Please show the proper respect for religion and for school children, and do not pass this bill.

Samantha Bender

Self, Therapist

El Paso, TX

As a trained therapist with practice working with school-aged children, I cannot emphasize how inappropriate this bill is. Allowing untrained individuals to replace counselors is not only irresponsible, but also harmful. This also infringes on student's religious beliefs and rights of religious freedom. Counselors, therapists, and psychological professionals must go through years of training and school counselors go through even more training. Replacing them with someone who does NOT have that expertise is harmful to students and an insult to mental health professionals. We wouldn't do this with other medical professionals. Mental health is medical health.

Chris Donofrio

Self

The Woodlands, TX

I strongly oppose HB 3614.

I urge you to kill it in committee.

Chaplains are not qualified to be school counselors.

A counselor is typically trained as a professional psychologist. They know how to deal with students.

There are already enough individuals to fill any gaps identified by school boards or the state.

Chaplains are, by definition, affiliated with a religion. Usually some Christian denomination.

As a non-Christian I fear students will be groomed to follow, mostly erroneous and harmful, Christian beliefs or actions.

HB 3614 is a clear violation of the separation of church and state. It is an endorsement of the inclusion of religion within a public, state-run institution.

Private, non-state funded schools can choose to employ chaplains as counselors. But not state-funded schools.

HB 3614 should never have even been introduced as it is such a flagrant violation of the Texas and US Constitutions.

This bill must die in committee.

Respectfully,

Chris J. Donofrio

Cindy Clayton

Self - technical writer

Houston, TX

I am appalled that a bill like HB 3614 was even filed, much less being considered by our legislature.

Replacing trained and certified school counselors with chaplains is a terrible idea--one that goes against the principle of religious freedom that can only exist when the publicly-funded resources of the commons are religiously neutral.

There is NO place for religious indoctrination in taxpayer-funded public schools, and such schools are the backbone of our nation's promise to educate its electorate.

Having only a Christian chaplain to go to with concerns at school would unnecessarily burden students who are religious minorities, as well as those who are gender-nonconforming or sexual minorities. Children in all of these groups would be put at risk for further marginalization at school, with the source of the danger coming directly from a school authority figure. And for all this, these children's parents would foot the bill with their taxes.

This bill is wrong-headed at best, and theocratic at worst. Texas is not a Christianist domain, and its public schools must remain places of learning, not extensions of religious institutions. HB 3614 must NOT pass.

Rachael Faith, School Counselor!

Self

Manvel, TX

This is utterly ridiculous, and a slap in the face, for those who have been educators in the district like myself for 17 years.

Chaplains are not going to be able to relate to the students and vice versa. You are going to see more mental health issues in our small communities because of this nonsense if it passes.

Robert Coleman

Self

Dallas, TX

I strongly oppose HB 3614 since it is a violation of the 1st Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and the Texas Constitution, Article 1 Sections 1, 3a, 6, 6a, 7, and 29. Every child in our public schools should have access to secular counselors, educated in concepts for aiding students with issues related to proper course selection, to prepare them for the next stages of education be that college, universities, technical schools, employment, and to aid them with psychological and emotional issues related to bullying, discrimination, grades, relationships with other students or teachers, and all related issues. Religious chaplains are not properly educated to handle such matters. This Bill along with its Senate equivocate (SB 763) are strongly supported by the National School Chaplains Association. This organization clearly sets forth its purposes for these two Bills: School chaplain duties include but are not limited to prayer, counsel, and spiritual care for the school staff, the students, and their families. They Offer counsel based on timeless biblical values, Serve as a source of biblical truth, and Help teachers and students navigate life's challenges. They offer training for prospective school chaplains to Follow the call to provide spiritual care for teachers and students. Learn about our chaplain certification and training program. The NSCA states that its CORE PRINCIPLES is: We display Christ in what we say and do. We meet people where they are, no matter the circumstance, to show compassion and love just as Jesus would. To be certified by the NSCA as a School Chaplain, the certification path: Level 1: Supplemental training, generally CISM and Active Shooter; Level 2: Eight-week training with Oklahoma Christian University and a class on Truth You for \$350; and Level 3: One school year of training with Oklahoma Christian University, \$10,500. Oklahoma Christian University is strongly affiliated with the Churches of Christ denomination. The University is located in Edmund, OK. The NSCA is located in Norman, OK. On April 13, 2023, the NSCA announced a Texas campaign supporting the passage of SB 763, which will of course financially benefit the NSCA, if it is passed. This publication makes it clear that the purpose of this two bills is to put only Christian Chaplains in Texas public schools. The NSCA also claims that Chaplains in schools help keep schools safer. Its methods are described as: "Chaplains make schools safer. Prevention is the key. Chaplains have the privileged opportunity to observe student behavior more holistically than teachers, counselors, or law enforcement. Conversations with chaplains are private. Therefore students are more straightforward and sincere, not having to worry about what goes on their transcript. If something raises a flag, certified chaplains know the proper procedure to advise authorities." One wonders how often they would report "flags" about students of color. Vote NO on HB 3614 (and SB 763).

Holly Whichard

Myself and other school counselora

Austin, TX

To be a school counselor in Texas, you not only need to have been a teacher for 2 years but you also need an master's degree in counseling or social work. Chaplains have experience counseling with a religious perspective. This is not appropriate in a public school setting. Students on come from all different backgrounds that may not want to talk to a peraon with a religious background.

Sincerely,

Holly Whichard

Professional School Counselor of 21 years

Jonathan Flores

Self

Commerce, TX

Without any formal training in diversity and lifespan, among other areas, this could hurt those children/youths receiving services from untrained professionals. Please, from a Counselor in Training, consider NOT passing this law

MARY WILLIAMS

SELF / SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

HOUSTON, TX

Please NO! The line that separates church and state will become too blurred. Students and families should not feel compelled to accept guidance from someone who may not be of their same faith background. Will the chaplain be required to remain religion neutral. Too many questions and concerns.

Betty Daugherty

Self

The Woodlands, TX

I oppose this bill as a social worker who spent much of my work life working with children. Chaplains are trained to comfort people using the tenets of their religion. Some of those tenets shame individuals. The most trauma is founded in shame experienced internally and externally. Children don't need shaming to help them succeed in life. For example : I had ministers working with gambling addiction . Those minister just said "say no" because it was against their religion. Addition is far more complicated than saying no. I had a minister say he couldn't work with gambling addition because that would be perceived as condoning gambling. Children have a difficulty enough time in this world . Counseling can help when experienced with trained professional. Thank you.

Jennifer Roberts

Self, School Counselor

Mansfield, TX

As a high school counselor, I am very confused by this bill. It's clear that the author has no idea how much education and training goes into becoming a school counselor. After almost 20 years as a teacher, I became a counselor. This is year three, and I still learn new things every day. My master's program was over 60 hours of college credit and the on the job training both during internship and as new laws and situations arise is ongoing. On a daily basis, we answer student and parent questions about current courses, planning for future years, and with transition to college, military, or work after high school. We ensure that students have the right coursework to graduate and help them make adjustments along the way as needed. We help students in crisis and support them and their families to find care, when needed. Right now we are ensuring that students have the correct state testing for graduation. A clergy person would be able to support about 5% of the scope of the school counselor position. Thank you.

Zoe Prendergast

Self/counseling student

Dallas, TX

This bill does not respect the training necessary to be a counselor and properly serve the students in our public education system. It also puts the job security of licensed counselors at risk.

Alma James, Ms

Self

Fort worth, TX

What happened separation of church and state? Do you want more Catholic Priest to abuse more children?

Reed Bilz, Ms

Self

Fort Worth, TX

I have sent six children through the Texas public schools. One of these six is a fully qualified school counselor.

HB 3614 would dismiss the years of training and experience counselors have and instead allow uncertified chaplains to do their job. It would also be a blatant violation of religious freedom, pushing a chaplain's individual religious beliefs on public school students who have varied faiths and cultural practices. It would especially harm LGBTQIA+ students who deserve a trained, accepting counselor to talk to — not a chaplain who may put personal beliefs above their needs.

I urge you to OPPOSE this bill. It is blatantly detrimental to Texas children's best interests.

Sharon Gillespie
self - retired teacher/professor
Austin, TX

I can hardly believe the race to the bottom Texas is making in public education. Chaplains are trained in theology; school counselors are trained to improve academic performance, increase participation in postsecondary education, and support students in career planning. Students today are faced with an increasing struggle to get a quality education and fewer dollars with which to do it. They should not be further hampered by the substitution of "religious guidance" for "career guidance." Help give them a fighting chance by giving them the guidance they need to succeed on their career paths. Please don't pass this bill out of committee.

Cindy Fountain, Ms
Self, Retail Merchandiser
Cleburne, TX

I oppose this bill! It is disrespectful to counselors, therapists and others who are specially trained to do this work for students. It will be discriminatory unless it has a chaplain to cover each and every religion of the students in that school. It reeks of Christian Nationalism that absolutely does not belong in the schools of a Democratic Republic. It is without a doubt unconstitutional. Thank you.

Kassyndra Keller, Mrs
AFT-Plus retired Texas School Counselor
Ennis, TX

Texas School Counselors are Professionals certified first as classroom teachers with several year's experience. Then they return to school to complete a Master's Degree in Counseling before passing TEA exams in School Counseling for Certification. This is required because Texas students deserve to have highly trained professional counselors available to them. The situations that school counselors handle on a daily basis are as varied as any other counselor will experience in any setting. The term "Chaplin" is first a religious title and second does not bring the same educational background, training, certification or experience that the Texas School Counselor brings to the school. Texas Students deserve to have Professional Counselors on Campus who are trained as counselors not religious leaders. School Counselors serve on ARD committees, maintain student data bases, work with testing directors and Diagnosticians. School Counselors schedule classes, help students with career planning and family communication. They teach students about getting along with others and good study skills. School Counselors are NOT REPLACEABLE.

Carolyn Mitchell, Rev
Texas Women for Justice
Conroe, TX

I urge you to oppose HB 3614, which allows the use of Chaplains in public schools in place of trained, licensed school counselors. Thank you.
Respectfully,
Rev. Carolyn Mitchell

Jean Brender, Dr.
self - Christian Spiritual Director, retired professor, and signer, Christians Against Christian Nationalism
Austin, TX

As a mother and former educator, I am asking the Public Education Committee to not pass House Bill 3614 related to school chaplains. While chaplains may be a helpful addition to the school team during and after a crisis, they are not trained nor certified in dealing with the many mental health and school-related issues that students face. Therefore, they should not be substituted for school counselors. This bill also undermines religious liberty and hinders the very good work school counselors already do.

David Padilla

Self

Austin, TX

Chaplain services can't possibly replace counselors. I don't want my children being counseled by people who ignore my religion in favor of their own. This will do nothing but to alienate children from their school staff.

Donna Oliver

Self Special Education Counselor

Nacogdoches, TX

I worked with youth via the mental health Authority of Texas for over 13 years as a Licensed Professional Counselor , and then another 4 years worked in public school with all ages under Special Education umbrella as a counselor, and I am still not allowed to work as a "school counselor". How does it make sense for a "chaplain" to suddenly be hireable ahead of someone like me? There are 1000s of LPCs in Texas seeking employment , why would that group be skipped over? Ridiculous.

Joshua moody

Parent & Retired Military

temple, TX

This is a big no thank you!

Elizabeth Yow, Ms.

Texas Freedom Network

Georgetown, TX

Please consider voting AGAINST HB3641. My name is Elizabeth Yow, I am a college student, so attending public school is in my recent memory. Some of my friends received counseling from school counselors. They have opened up to me and other friends and said that the counseling they received will positively impact literally the rest of their lives.

Chaplains can be great and helpful in various situations, but they should NOT be replacing school guidance counselors who are trained mental health professionals.

While I know that some chaplains are also certified in counseling, not all are. There should be many more trained mental health professionals and guidance counselors in schools. The good that mental health support is do for youth would be astronomical, society would be in a much better trajectory.

I am fortunate that the two people I know in my life who are chaplains are LGBTQ+ affirming/supportive, but unfortunately not all chaplains are. Getting rid of trained mental health professionals would drastically impact LGBTQ+ youth who deal with mental health problems at higher rates. Having an adult mentor affirm them is so powerful to positively lift them up. Chaplains can one resource for youth. Guidance counselors should stay. (And in my opinion more resources should be put into hiring more). Thank you.

Parisa Mahmud

self

Plano, TX

Please do not vote for this bill. Chaplains have no counseling training relevant to counseling at a school, it is truly absurd to even consider this.

Maya Reeves

Self / educator

Dallas, TX

School counseling is a specialized field that requires the expertise of trained professionals. Any bill seeking to replace those trained professionals with untrained individuals should not pass.

Giuliana Castellanos

Self

Houston, TX

I am a Spring Branch Isd tax payer and absolutely disagree with HB 3614, districts employing chaplains goes against the separation between church and state that allows for the inclusion of all religions and faiths. Having a Christian chaplain is not inclusive and should never be considered. School counselors should have training in child psychology, which chaplains do not have. Absolutely not to bill HB3614!!!

Maddie McLemore

Self - Licensed Professional Counselor

Dallas, TX

I'm currently a student attaining my masters in counseling in Dallas, Texas. As a student working extremely hard to secure my career, I feel that passing this bill would be a disgrace to the counseling professional. Masters students spend a lot of money and time to dedicate their lives to this passion of counseling and attaining a higher level of education to advance their career and make a change. From a christian and counseling student, please do not pass this bill.

Aaron Relyea

Self

Grand Prairie, TX

LPC are properly trained licensed professionals and more are needed for our children not less qualified unprofessional people and we don't need clergy inside our public schools.

Abby Roberson

Self practicum counselor

Dallas, TX

Do not pass we cannot allow chaplains to become school counselors without the proper training necessary to help guide young students and our future.

Alexis Santa Cruz

Self

Dallas, TX

Please vote no to passing HB3614.

Kelsey Whitebay

Self

Houston, TX

I am very against this proposal. Church chaplains are NOT certified counselors. Our children need trained and certified counselors to help them navigate today's mental, social, and educational challenges. They deserve educate/ trained staff who have experience with child psychology and will provide unbiased guidance and support. Chaplains are trained but the church and have no business in a public school setting. I fully believe in separation of Church and State. Texas is a multi cultural state, we should not be indoctrinating them with religious teachings as their main source of guidance and counseling. Especially given this bill is not requiring the chaplains have any formal training or certification. Please vote no this bill.

Claudia Reed, Student counselor

Southern Methodist university

Dallas, TX

Vote No, not to allow chaplains to be school counselors.

Abby Baker, Ms.

Self, teacher and graduate school student

Garland, TX

VOTE NO

Rachel Barnes

SMU

Missouri City, TX

OPPOSE

Celina Bautovich

Self

The Woodlands, TX

Chaplains should not be able to preform duties of school counseled because they are not qualified for the job. This is a terrible idea.

Gem Scott

Self- School Counselor

Pflugerville, TX

Chaplains and school counselors share many commonalities. Both professions include individuals who are sympathetic, kindhearted, supportive, and want to help others become the best version of themselves. However, school counseling requires a deeper knowledge of the educational process that a chaplain may not fully understand. School counselors are required to spend a certain amount of years in the classroom before holding the position. This is important as we better understand the mindset of the teacher and how they relate to students. It also allows us to make connections with various situations to help facilitate optimal outcomes for all parties. Also, employing chaplains negates the time that school counselors devote to furthering their educations to learn and become qualified to work with students and build comprehensive, data-driven school counseling programs. It's my position that school counselors should not be replaced by chaplains as it's not in the best interest of students, teachers, staff & families. School counselors are leaders in schools and work hard every day to serve our campuses with an abundance of knowledge, compassion and hope for the future.

Stephany Moore

self

Round Rock, TX

This bill would dismiss the years of training and experience counselors have and instead allow uncertified chaplains to do their job. It would also be a blatant violation of religious freedom, pushing a chaplain's individual religious beliefs on public school students who have varied faiths and cultural practices. It would especially harm LGBTQIA+ students who deserve a trained, accepting counselor to talk to — not a chaplain who may put personal beliefs above their needs.

Abbie Short

Self

Dallas, TX

I am currently being trained as a child counselor. Allowing chaplains to preform as a counselor not only does a disservice to all counselors who have been professionally trained for their role, but also to the children in these school districts. Counselors are trained and required to gain over 3,000 hours of supervision. This equips them in dealing with various crisis situations in the most ethical and professional way. Children and families have the religious freedom to seek spiritual guidance at the local church. My cohorts and I do not believe chaplains are equally yoked in skill or knowledge as counselors, we request that this bill not be passed.

Marla Jones
SMU Counseling
Dallas, TX

Chaplains are not competent in school counseling.

Kasye Palmer
Self
Richardson, TX

This bill is a very bad idea. The separation of church and state is a fundamental building block of the constitution. HB 3614 would allow schools to replace certified school counselors with uncertified chaplains.

Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program.

There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill.

Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

Please oppose HB 3614 when it is heard by the Public Education Committee on Thursday.

Kari Wallace
Self/ self employed
Houston, TX

What happened to separation of church and state, a fundamental principle of our government? I am a Christian, and I am horrified that you want to force your personal religious beliefs on children of all faiths by infiltrating our schools with individuals who are untrained to deal with any of the issues our current counselors address. This bill is a waste of my tax dollars and an embarrassment to our state. Why don't you focus your efforts on keeping our children safe from gun violence while in school instead of this petty, un-American nonsense?

Whitney Hall
Self
houston, TX

This bill should not be supported. A chaplain is not a replacement for a licensed counselor and this will alienate students who do not practice that faith.

Alison Westermann
Self. Nonprofit fundraising.
El Paso, TX

This bill would dismiss the years of training and experience counselors have and instead allow uncertified chaplains to do their job. It would also be a blatant violation of religious freedom, pushing a chaplain's individual religious beliefs on public school students who have varied faiths and cultural practices. It would especially harm LGBTQIA+ students who deserve a trained, accepting counselor to talk to — not a chaplain who may put personal beliefs above their needs.

Texas students deserve to enjoy true religious freedom at public school without being forced to learn according to the religious right's belief system. As a Jew, I find it deeply offensive that religious clergy could be employed in public schools to offer services that should be provided by licensed, professional counselors from a purely secular perspective. The separation of church and state is not negotiable, and efforts like this to impose White Christian Nationalism into public schools will not go unnoticed.

Jennifer Lowe
self
Clyde, TX

I, Jennifer Lowe, represent myself. I am in favor of HB3614 for many reasons.

Since Covid, I and many friends have witnessed mental health struggles and fallen grades. School chaplains have proven to motivate students which has resulted in improved grades and positive mental outlook.

Every public institution in Texas employs chaplains. The military, first responders, prisons, and even airports have chaplains. Why are our teachers and students denied the same spiritual care as them?

Jeremy Pope, Chaplain
Self, Board Certified Chaplain
Fort Worth, TX

I am a Board Certified Chaplain through the Association of Professional Chaplains. I am currently a pediatric hospice Chaplain and have been for almost six years. I am, by training, not qualified to stand in for a Professional School Counselor. An untrained "chaplain" is especially not trained for such work. Not only does an untrained "chaplain" answer to no one (trained, Board Certified Chaplains must be endorsed by a denominational body), but they absolutely lack the training and expertise needed for work with children. It is irresponsible for anyone to put untrained, unprepared people in a place of such importance. Not only is there no purpose in this change, but it puts our children in danger. Professional school counselors must often deal with those undergoing mental health challenges. Allowing an untrained person to be responsible for walking children through these times is abhorrent. Trained, board certified Chaplains would find this work outside of our scope and against our ethical guidelines. We are to never invoke our own spiritual beliefs or opinions on others. We are always to reinforce the beliefs and values of those we are serving. Leave mental health work to professionals. Do not allow a completely untrained and unaccountable person loose on our most vulnerable citizens.

Donna de la Guardia
self
Bedford, TX

I respectfully request the Texas House of Representatives to vote HB 3614 down. Our students deserve to have certified professional school counselors available to them. My tax dollars are best spent on a certified school counselor. Our students are under so much pressure in this fast pace world that we live in and need to be able to speak confidentially to an unbiased professional. Certified professional school counselors receive years of training to understand the different developmental stages that children go through and how assist them not to make emotional decisions that they may regret as well as to know when the child is struggling so much that they may need to refer the child for additional resources. Chaplains do not have the professional training nor are they unbiased, their expertise is theology not in child development. Our Texas children deserve better support - unbiased support from certified professional school counselors. I truly feel you would be doing a huge disservice to the children of Texas, your child(ren).

Vote HB 3614 down for all Texas children so they may have certified professional school counselors available to them should they need help. Thank you.

Susan Anderson, Dr.
Texas UU Justice Ministry
Benbrook, TX

This violates separation of church and state, plain and simple. Furthermore, it seems to bypass training requirements for school counselors. How about, instead of this bill, you allocate money to train, hire, and support more school counselors, because we need that.

Thomas Bear
Self - Disabled
Austin, TX

Religious Chaplains have NO place in public schools as counselors or in any other position. Religious counseling should remain within the framework of religious organizations and not be allowed in public schools, where EDUCATION is of utmost importance.

PATTY BANDY

Education
EULESS, TX

As a certified educator, a person who attended seminary and has a strong faith, I disagree wholeheartedly with allowing chaplains take the place of school counselors. I took pastoral counseling classes as well as continuing Ed school counselee courses. They are very different. One deals with spiritual health as related to faith tradition the other mental health. Can one effect the other yes, yet students come from multiple or no spiritual backgrounds. There is a constitutional separation of church and state. It is important that a school counselor be qualified and have studied mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, as well as a variety of neurodiversity conditions such as Autism, ID, CP, and more. Never once did pastoral counseling courses cover any of these.

Please do not Pass this bill.

Patty Bandy, MTS
Certified Educator

Carisa Brown
Self, professional school counselor
Lampasas, TX

I have been in the school setting as a school counselor for the last four years and absolve my career. I have built relationships with my students, their parents and our staff. But that is only a very small portion of my job. I've also been a classroom teacher that gives the background and academic knowledge on how to help a student effectively within their academic struggles. I'm able to go into classrooms and support teachers that are struggling with student behaviors to find the antecedents and implement plans that teachers can utilize without breaking up the rigor of their teaching. When reviewing a students cumulative file with my MTSS team we can devise a plan to h provide academic supports that will be be effective alongside any struggles or behaviors the student might be having.

Please don't take those supports away from our students. Chaplains do not have that expertise or knowledge to provide the support for our students that TEA has set through STAAR and the TEKS that must be mastered.

I implore the maker of the bill to come and spend a day with a school counselor in an elementary setting and they will quickly understand why our professional training is a must to be successful for our students and teachers.

Janice Holladay, LPC-S
Self/licensed professional counselor
Killeen, TX

I'm writing about HB 3614. I strongly oppose this bill. I have been a Licensed Professional Counselor for over 20 years. I also have a Texas certification as a School Counselor and as a teacher. I taught in Brenham and Temple in parochial schools for two years and in Killeen public schools for 7.

During my years teaching, I came to truly appreciate the school counselors. In order to be a school counselor in Texas, you have to first be a teacher and then get more education and training on top of that. Because school counselors had been teachers, they were able to work as a team with teachers better. It was easier to quickly communicate concerns regarding a child because we had a shared frame of reference and language specific to the classroom. That was very important and streamlined the process of helping kids. School counselors also provided just basic emotional support for teachers. They understood our stressors.

As noted, I worked in parochial schools as well. The Pastor could make himself available to a child in need, but they lacked the specific training and experience needed.

When I worked at Cedar Crest, I valued the role of our chaplains both with patients and as morale boosters for staff. However, they didn't take over counseling duties because that's not their training. Pastoral counseling has its place, but it didn't replace the actual professionals in mental health counseling. It shouldn't replace school counselors, either.

I understand there can be fears about school counselors. In my opinion and based on both my years of experience and actual published research in education, those fears are unfounded. Social-emotional learning is crucial to better educational outcomes. Look at Finland and how they address the developmental needs of children in all areas in school, and then look at their outcomes.

School counseling is a specialized profession and should be done by those who've earned the credentials.

Lizdelia Pinon, Parent of 4 Texas public school children
Self
Crowley, TX

I am against HB 3614 as a parent of 4 Texas public students I do not want an unlicensed person such a chaplain who may force a religious view at a public school doing counselor task instead of a professional counselor. Please keep state and religion separate in Texas!

April Vick
self
Conroe, TX

Chaplains are not properly trained to attend to the full range of duties assigned to a school counselor. Secondly, the employment of chaplains would violate the separation of church and state.

Sherryl Quellhorst
Self
Los Fresnos, TX

Chaplains and school counselors are each specially trained for their unique responsibilities. Hiring a chaplain as a school counselor is like hiring a welder to fill a chef's position. Despite their title, school counselors have to perform many educational duties as well as counseling, which is why they must first be certified as teachers. This bill would be a huge disservice to students and schools.

Heather Morse

Self; teacher

Houston, TX

Allowing public school districts to employ chaplains to perform the duties of school counselors is a grave mistake, and a misuse of taxpayer dollars in public schools. School counselors are highly trained, in more demand than ever, and qualified specifically for that job--while chaplains are not. This bill must NOT pass.

Karen Kruger

Self/School Counselor

Kingwood, TX

I oppose this bill and am concerned that it would not be in the best interest of our students across the state. School counselors not only have experience in education, but they also have specific training through their masters programs. Both educational components and mental health knowledge and expertise are critical in the roles and responsibilities of school counselors. It would be a detriment to our students to allow people without this extensive knowledge and training to allow them to perform duties of school counselors.

Michelle LeBlanc

Blue Sky Marketing

Houston, TX

I am OPPOSED to this bill. Separation of church and state is guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States of America. This is an outright violation of that wall of separation. This bill (if passed) will then be drug through the Courts and be overturned at more expense to Texas taxpayers.

Richard Allen, Professor

Makom Shelanu Congregation

Fort worth, TX

I am a college professor at a major private Texas university. My wife is a Cantor (Jewish Clergy), serving Makom Shelanu Congregation in Ft. Worth. She is also a Chaplain and has worked both in hospitals and in hospice. We both strongly object to having chaplains replace school counselors.

The role of a chaplain is to provide spiritual care to those who need and request it. Most chaplains have no formal training or certification when it comes to working with students and are unequipped to deal with the issues they would face in a school setting - including mental health challenges. This legislation would actively harm children by not giving them access to qualified professionals in a place where, and at a time when, they arguably need them more than ever.

We are also imagining that these chaplains would mostly represent the Christian community, and that is bound to make many students of other faiths less comfortable opening up . Even if these school chaplains are prohibited from evangelizing, their very presence would send a strong message that mental health problems can be solved with a good dose of spirituality - and only a specific version of what that looks like.

There are so many ways that students can experience trauma in school. Please, do not let the passage of this bill be one of them. Please vote no on HB 3614.

Amber Gibson

self

Klein, TX

Religion does not belong in public schools. Counselors have a specific skill set that our schools need.

Linda Evans, Ms

Self

Conroe, TX

Vote no on this terrible bill HB 3614!

Chaplains do not have the training or expertise of licensed, professional school counselors. Licensed school counselors are trained to provide services to ALL students equitably and must adhere to the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics. Keep separation of church and state! Parents are the ones to determine religious training. We need more trained vounselors, not preachers in public school!

VOTE NO HB 3614

Cathy Nanni

Self

DALLAS, TX

Please do not pass this bill. Chaplains do not receive the same training as licensed mental health providers.

Jenny Roberson-Mayer

Self

Houston, TX

This is ridiculous. We need counselors. We don't need more religion in school.

Jones Kristen

Self/caregiver

Willis, TX

Not all students are Christian and should not be forced to see a chaplain who is untrained, uneducated, and most certainly biased. This is indoctrination and encroaches on both students and parents rights. We are Americans and our Constitution protects our right to practice, or not, any religion we choose.

Mark Chapa

School Counselors

Los Fresnos, TX

Good Morning Committee members.

My name is Mark Chapa and I am School Counselor. I have 22 years as a counselor and 28 total years in Education. I am one of the many that continue my professional development. I believe you need to hear that having a background in the classroom as a teacher is a necessary need for anyone called to be a school counselor the knowledge of the school community is of essence to be able to effectively maneuver as a school counselor. While a chaplain has a calling to serve and my have a skill set to help others a counselor must be insightful on all aspects of school counseling not just the spiritual. It is my humble but strong opinion that allowing chaplains without school community experience is a grave mistake. Please share this with all the community members. May God guide you to make the best choice for students and society please do not support chaplains or anyone else with out the educational community insightful experience.

Delaina Bishop

Self/ Parent of young school age children in public schools

Austin, TX

I highly OPPOSE this bill. To allow this blatant disregard for our secular schools and all who attend, is not only against religious freedom and separation of church and state; but it would not help the mental health crisis Americans are having. We need TRAINED PROFESSIONALS who specialize in children and young adults in our schools. There are several reasons this is a horrible idea. And even though you put the hiring process onto the locally elected school boards. I know not all school board trustees were honest about who they were when running for election, or do not have our public schools best interest at heart. I know some would go against sound judgement and what the majority of parents want. Having someone not associated with the State of Texas Education is also a huge red flag for accountability. If parents want their child religious help they have plenty of places to take them- that is free and abundant.

We need to set our students up for success and give them access to real therapeutic help.

Santosh Kulkarni

Self, Software developer

Frisco, TX

I strongly object to appointing chaplains in place of counselors. This is wrong on two counts. One chaplains are not trained counselors.

Second they follow a certain belief that may or may not match with the students who could be Hindu like my kid or any other religion or have their own belief system

Christina Ginn, Self. School Marketing & PR

Self

Houston, TX

I'm writing to ask that our elected officials vote no to HB 3614. School counselors complete specialized training and education in assisting students of all religions and backgrounds. They also provide invaluable assistance to students as they prepare for their futures: college admissions, scholarships, military and career readiness, and more. Schools should be safe havens for ALL students, not just those who are of a certain faith. In addition, this clearly violates the separation of church and state set up by the founding fathers of this nation. We should not be picking and choosing which portions of the constitution we will adhere to. One of my children graduated in 2022 and the other is currently a sophomore. Contrary to the agendas pushed by the right, God is not banned from public schools. Christian students are not persecuted and this bill will only hurt marginalized students. Our elected officials should champion ALL students, not just those who look and believe as they do. Thank you.

Margaret Schulenberg

self / retired

Round Rock, TX

I have serious concerns about HB 3614.

This bill would allow school districts to hire chaplains instead of trained counsellors.

Our students deserve trained counsellors.

Those students who wish to receive guidance from their faith leader may properly seek such guidance from their house of worship in the community.

But public schools must not be paying for religious leaders.

This is a clear violation of the establishment clause, and discriminates against each and every student not of the chosen faith.

Reject HB 3614.

Sydney Greenblatt, Ms

self

Houston, TX

I object to having chaplains replace school counselors. It is unacceptable on so many levels.

This is a blatant violation of the separation of church and state. Additionally, the role of a chaplain is to provide spiritual care to those who need and request it. Most chaplains have no formal training or certification when it comes to working with students and are unequipped to deal with the issues they would face in a school setting - including mental health challenges. This legislation would actively harm children by not giving them access to qualified professionals in a place where, and at a time when, they arguably need them more than ever.

If these chaplains come from the Christian community, that will make many students of other faiths (or no faith) very uncomfortable and apprehensive. Even if the chaplains are prohibited from evangelizing in the public schools, their very presence would send a strong message that mental health problems can be solved with a good dose of spirituality - and only a specific version of what that looks like.

There are so many ways that students can experience trauma in school. Please, do not let the passage of this bill be one of them. Please vote no on HB 3614.

Deborah Leiber, Ms.

Self

The Woodlands, TX

Please do not support this bill!! Chaplains are not qualified to be school counselors who are required to have extensive education, licensing, and several years of experience working in a school to qualify for their position. This bill would also violate the separation of Church and State by allowing religious indoctrination of students.
Vote NO for HB 3614!!

Respectfully,

Deborah Leiber

Nilesh Kulkarni

Self

Plano, TX

Need proper counseling without bias. Do not approve this in public education.

Katherine McClellan

Self

Leander, TX

First of all, there is separation of church and state and in no way should a chaplain be able to serve in the capacity of a counselor. Having a certified education counselor is a must. A chaplain is a religious affiliated person and as a non Christian, this would make myself and my child very uncomfortable. We have children attending school who come from very different cultures and having a chaplain instead of a counselor would be detrimental to them. This is unacceptable and I'm cannot believe anyone would come up with this bill. This needs to be shut down.

Terri Pease

Self; Parent; Business Administrator

San Antonio, TX

I am a public school parent and I'm AGAINST HB 3614. Highly trained, professional school counselors have played a vital role in my children's education. Each of my kids have unique needs and because their counselors have spent years in training, they have been exceptional at meeting those needs. My kids are thriving at school because of their gifted counselors. For example, my youngest daughter has a severe learning disability. When she was in first grade it was still undiagnosed and she was struggling in the classroom. She felt overwhelmed and would ask to go see the nurse every time she needed a "brain break." She was unable to communicate her feelings or worries because she was only 6! But, the attentive nurse became concerned that there was something else bigger going on, called me, and suggested we ask the school counselor for help. Sure enough, the counselor was able to work with my daughter to get to the root cause of her frequent need to see the nurse and begin the process to get her tested for learning disabilities. She continued to meet with my daughter periodically throughout her entire time in elementary school to ensure that she had what she needed to succeed in the classroom- both academically and emotionally. My daughter is now a confident 6th grader because of the consistent, loving care shown by her counselor. I will forever be grateful for Mrs. Melanie Jackson.

I am also a devout Christian. I believe in prayer and know that chaplains have an important role at places like hospitals because of the very specific and unique needs found there. Chaplains receive minimal training and are not equipped to meet the wide range of issues that counselors encounter every day. They have 1 tool in their toolbox, whereas counselors have a plethora.

To be frank, chaplains and counselors do not have the same skill set and are absolutely not interchangeable. I suffer from anxiety and depression and prayer is one tool I use to help fight it. But, thankfully, I've also seen a licensed professional counselor and she has given me more tools that I can use to manage and treat my mental health issues. I pray that God will heal me, and I believe that the gifts he's given counselors is one of the ways he answers that prayer.

Please vote NO on this bill. It will be a detriment to our public schools. Thank you.

Katrina Daneshvar

Self, District Student Counselor

Houston, TX

I do not support this bill due to concerns. I can't imagine that chaplains have the education or training to deal with the issues that occur in schools. Also, while I am a person of faith, I wonder if some students would not seek out help because they might not be comfortable talking to a chaplain. I think a better bill would be to expand the use of professional counselors to work for schools as counselors. I am an LPC-S with over 15 years experience and cannot work for a public ISD because my background is not in education. We need more mental health professionals in schools. I currently work for a charter school system and I know firsthand the mental health issues schools are facing, they are serious and they are plenty.

Caren Edelstein

National Council of Jewish Women

Dallas, TX

I urge you to vote NO to HB 3614. This bill would allow chaplains to replace trained and certified school counselors who work every day with students to be replaced by chaplains. This would violate the separation of church and state. Who chooses these chaplains, will they be from the students faith tradition?

If these chaplains are from one particular denomination will the students be comfortable enough to talk with them? Our school counselors work with students every day and the students have a level of trust that they would not have with an outside person who may not agree with their faith tradition. As a person of faith I find this bill highly offensive and urge you please to vote NO on this bill!

Denise Archambeault, Dr.

Self, stay-at-home parent and school volunteer

Round Rock, TX

I am writing as both a parent of school-aged children and a school volunteer to speak out against the concept of allowing chaplains to perform the duties of school counselors. With the current mental health crises affecting children they deserve help from counselors with specialized training and recognized certifications. While chaplains are essential to the communities they serve, they are not equivalent to certified school counselors. To put it another way, I hold a doctorate in physiology/biosciences but that does not mean that I am “close enough” to fill the role of a school nurse.

Additionally, the employment of chaplains as school counselors would be a violation of the separation of church and state, creating a situation that does not belong in our public schools. Also, would only Christian chaplains be allowed to serve as counselors or would support people from all religions be deployed in this way? If a chaplain is considered qualified to serve as a school counselor then surely similarly-skilled individuals from other faiths would be as well.

As a parent, my bottom line is that it is unacceptable for public school kids to be receiving unqualified social-emotional learning or support from ANYONE, and especially not someone whose experience comes solely from the framework of counseling in a religious capacity. With so much talk about “parental rights”, I have a right to decide for MY children when and where they will receive counseling from a chaplain or other religiously-affiliated individual. Our public school children deserve care from the amazing certified school counselors who have made it their life’s work to help our children learn to navigate their way through school and beyond.

Jessica Knickerbocker

Self/caregiver

League city, TX

As far as I can ever remember I have heard it’s best to keep church and state separate let our kids the truth, chaplains are not educational teachers.

John Litzler

Texas Baptists Christian Life Commission

Dallas, TX

Texas Baptists is convention of more than 5,300 Baptist churches across the State of Texas. Over the last 20 years we have endorsed more than 1,000 chaplains for service in a variety of areas including health care systems and the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. We are the fourth largest endorser of chaplains to the armed forces. We believe strongly in the work of chaplains and the positive influence they could have in Texas schools. Our organization has worked with lawmakers in prior sessions to help explain the chaplaincy endorsement process. While Texas Baptists appreciates the effort and intent behind HB 3614, the bill could be improved by placing guardrails to ensure the chaplains providing services at schools are properly qualified. The legislation should require a chaplain hired by a school to have proper credentials. For example, only allowing those chaplains who have received endorsement for chaplaincy by a program accredited by federal agency would ensure that a chaplain had meaningful credentials. Additionally, chaplaincy services for children differ greatly from those chaplaincy services offered TDCJ or the military where the primary beneficiary of services are adults. As a result, chaplains hired by schools should be required to provide evidence of training specific to working with minor children. The legislation also raises concerns that some school districts may, unintentionally, discriminate based on religion when making employment decisions for chaplains. To help alleviate these concerns, the bill could state explicitly that schools must use religion-neutral criteria when hiring a chaplain to provide services in the school. We are grateful for the legislature’s interest in improving services for students in Texas public schools. However, this legislation needs guardrails to ensure there are not unintended consequences that could cause harm to students. We believe there are simple changes, that are not unduly burdensome and do not thwart the author’s intent, that could be made to improve HB 3614.

Kelly Green
self/School Counselor
Frisco, TX

School counselors are trained professionals who are not only educators with classroom experience, but also master degreed counselors trained in therapeutic tenets and crisis management. School counselors develop and manage a comprehensive program that includes not only social emotional support, but also extensive indirect support which includes scheduling, credits, graduation plans, ARDs, 504s, RTIs, and much, much more. Chaplains simply do not have the qualifications, nor the educational experience to be able to manage nor execute an effective and comprehensive school counseling program. In addition, employing chaplains would be a direct violation of the separation of church and state. Students who do not follow the Christian faith would not feel comfortable speaking a member of the clergy. Counselors need to be neutral, supportive, and have unconditional positive regard. Would a chaplain be able to listen objectively to a student who is a self-proclaimed atheist?

Jaci Elliott, Ms.
Retired Texas Teacher
Schulenburg, TX

More than ever, our students need trained counselors in our schools to help them navigate not only academic progress/testing, but the vast number of situations a growing, developing and questioning young mind encounters.

HB 3614, which would let schools replace their Professional School Counselors with untrained chaplains, is up in the public education committee today.

This bill would dismiss the years of training and experience counselors have and instead allow uncertified chaplains to do their job. It would also be a blatant violation of religious freedom, pushing a chaplain's individual religious beliefs on public school students who have varied faiths and cultural practices. It would especially harm LGBTQIA+ students who deserve a trained, accepting counselor to talk to — not a chaplain who may put personal beliefs above their needs.

Certified and dedicated counselors know best how to serve the needs of our public school students. While chaplains minister to their congregants, it is an infringement on the separation of church and state to ask them to act as school guidance sources, when our public school students come from various homes where many different faiths may be practiced (or none at all).

HB 3614 is another means to undermine our public school systems, in much the same way as our governor would like to defund public schools to finance vouchers for private, religious and home schooling. Please do not support this bill. Texas students deserve to enjoy true religious freedom at public school without being forced to learn according to the religious right's belief system.

Thank you for your service,

Jaci Elliott

Jennifer Jefferson

self, director

Austin, TX

School counselors are trained professionals who work in public schools. Chaplains are professionals who work in religious institutions. I oppose measures to devalue the role of counselors by substituting chaplains rather than professionals who support all students. This bill limits student and parent ability to be supported in a public school setting and would be contested in many court systems.

Rebecca Bilz

Self

CLIFTON, TX

I am a school counsel with a Masters degree and 25 years of experience.

I am writing to you to urge you to OPPOSE HB 3614 The bill would dismiss the years of training and experience counselors have and instead allow uncertified chaplains to do their job. It would also be a blatant violation of religious freedom, pushing a chaplain's individual religious beliefs on public school students who have varied faiths and cultural practices. It would especially harm LGBTQIA+ students who deserve a trained, accepting counselor to talk to — not a chaplain who may put personal beliefs above their needs. Please vote NO to this bill that would do harm to Texas children.

Richard-Michael Calzada

Self, Private Practice Therapist

Denton, TX

I am a Licensed Professional Counselor in the state of Texas. I understand that school counselors require extensive training in clinical mental health, including diagnosing, assessment, and multicultural awareness. To place school chaplains in place of school counselors, in any capacity, is inviting a risk of further mental health concerns to all involved. School counselors are licensed to recognize and respond to a variety of mental health crises; school chaplains are not. Please do not pass this bill, as it would likely endanger all parties involved. We must give due diligence to our children and chaplains in the school setting.

Michelle LoweSolis

Self

San Antonio, TX

I am totally against this. Please get qualified school counselors for our students. This blurs the line between Church and state and should not be allowed. Vote no on this bill.

EVE MARGOLIS

self

Austin, TX

I absolutely oppose HB 3614. Chaplains This puts students who identify as LGBTQ, who are Jewish, Muslim, or frankly anyone who doesn't follow the Christian religion and beliefs of hired chaplain at a higher risk than having no support adult at all because it invites indoctrination.

House Bill 3614, which would permit chaplains to take over the role of professional school counselors, should be opposed as it undermines the safety and well-being of students. Professional school counselors are trained and licensed professionals who provide critical mental health and academic support services to students. Replacing them with chaplains, who lack the same level of qualifications and expertise, could put students' mental and emotional health at risk. Furthermore, chaplains' religious beliefs and practices may not align with those of all students, potentially creating an uncomfortable or exclusionary environment. All students deserve access to qualified and impartial professionals who can provide comprehensive and evidence-based support

David Troiano
Self-Retired
Highland Village, TX

HB 3614 would allow public school districts to hire chaplains as school counselors, inevitably leading to chaplains unconstitutionally coercing students to participate in religious activities. Also there is no discussion of whether chaplains are qualified to be counselors and what acceptable conduct is for them.

Elizabeth McKay
Texas Rising
Corpus Christi, TX

Texas students deserve to enjoy true religious freedom at public school. Being forced to learn according to someone else's religious right's belief system is wrong. I demand you vote NO to HB 3614!

Carole Lafreniere
Self
Bedford, TX

Chaplains are not qualified to perform counseling and social services. They do not have the same education or training. Counselors and Social Workers hold Masters Degrees have supervision and training, pass licensing exams. Theology degrees are religion training and public schools serve all religions including no religions. This will hurt kids.

Elizabeth Cusack
Self, Elderly Parents' Caregiver, Community Volunteer in Education, and Parent
Fairview, TX

I am appalled that this bill exists. I recognize that Texas is moving towards a theocracy but I as a practicing Christian object strongly to this eroding separation of Church and State. In passing this bill, Texans would be missing the message of Christ in Mark 12:17. Public education is meant to be free of religious affiliation so that it can serve the diverse needs of many families. Moreover, have you forgotten the Texas state requirements for a school counselor? These are the trained professionals with educational experience and hold a master's degree from an institution of higher education that is accredited by an accrediting agency, as recognized by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Counselors are trained to work with children in critical situations regarding mental health, family counseling and the list goes on. A chaplain does not have these requirements, most importantly no requirement to have worked in an educational setting prior to working in a school! Chaplains will bring their religious denomination background into the work they do so that yet again would make them a terrible fit for the public education setting.

Patricia Goforth
self- real estate agent
Austin, TX

School counselors go through a lot of training and education to be qualified for that role. Besides not being trained for that specific role, there have been SO many sexual abuse scandals around kids and their church leaders. Texas House Rep Slayton was served as a youth and family minister for 13 years and is now under criminal investigation for taking his underage intern to his apartment and also giving her alcohol. How many other vulnerable kids did he abuse? Putting vulnerable kids in the hands of potential pedophiles is a NO. I got amazing guidance from my church growing up and I will always be grateful for that, but school Counselors need to go through the current education channels for that role and be vetted- being vetted only by the church is clearly not enough.

Maureen Voosen
Self
Austin, TX

Chaplains do not have the certifications or requirements as school counselors and religious resources should be provided outside of the public school environment.

Kasey Kuehler, LPC

Self

Morton, TX

I work as an LPC, licensed professional counselor, in the state of Texas. I am contracted 10 hours a week to go into a local school to help with mental health needs. The school counselors do not have the training to help with some of the needs. I do not think a chaplain would be prepared to help in schools without the proper training.

Hannah Pruitt

ACA

Dallas, TX

This should not be passed due to the extensive training school counselors pursue in order to fulfill the duties of school counselor. Chaplains without training for the role would not be appropriate

Heidi Ganss Harris

Self

Houston, TX

This is outrageous. A clear conflict of church and state. Chaplains should not be school counselors at public schools. Please vote no.

Katelyn Kent

Self

Houston, TX

I am strongly opposed to this. Licensed school counselors can perform the same tasks (and more) that a chaplain can perform. At a time when the mental health of our students is critical, we should not be removing trained professionals and replacing them with people who do not hold masters degrees in a mental health field. Regularly, school shootings are blamed on mental health. If we remove mental health professionals from schools (or replace them with persons with lesser training), it stands to reason that this bill endangers students quite literally. Furthermore, I do not support paying for chaplains with state money.

Tracey Banks

Self -physician

Mckinney, TX

I oppose this bill. Professional school counselors must have a Master's degree in counseling and complete a school preparation course. Chaplains do not have have the same education or training. They do not have education in classroom guidance. Our kids DESERVE better.

Jeanette Choy

Self

Houston, TX

I am opposed to this bill. There should be a separation between church and state.

Gerard Cavanaugh

Retired

Burleson, TX

Please vote against this bill. Uneducated and untrained preachers, ministers, imams and Rabbis have no place in public education. Rather than try to help, those people will try to convert vulnerable children. Also, preachers, ministers, and priests along with youth ministers coaches and teachers are more likely to sexually abuse a child than would a professional counselor. Keep the wall between religion and state tall and strong.

Annette Johnson

self

Tomball, TX

I do not believe that chaplains should served as school counselors. Counselors should have specific special training and education in dealing with the mental health issues that effect teenagers and younger students. Chaplains have their place in hospital settings and churches, but not in public schools. Allowing chaplains to have positions in our schools opens up the possibility of religious proselytizing to young, impressionable minds. That is not the purpose of public school counseling. As a retired social worker, I strongly encourage you to vote no on this bill.

Robert Murry, Mr

Self

Austin, TX

AGAINST THIS CONCEPT. Mixing religion is a slippery slope. Whose religion is ok to represent as a counselor? Are "chaplains" from mosques, synagogues, Hindu temples, Catholic Churches, all Protestant faiths, Calvinists, LDS, Buddhists, Bahá'í faith, Celtic polytheists, Slavic Neo-pagans , and every other religion including Voodoo allowed to be counselors or just one or two faiths? Let's not fight the constitution by making some ok and others not. That's my two cents. Use some critical thinking.

Patsy Lander

Self

Wylie, TX

Texas children and their families deserve more than a mere chaplain when it come to counseling in our schools. I'm extremely concern about unqualified individuals being involved in teaching our children. There are no educational requirements for a chaplain. School counselor's do far more than just "counseling." They are responsible for helping students navigate their education requirements as well as their day to day classes! Personally as a parent, I would be livid to discover that a religious leader was involved at my child's school. Please do not dum down Texas schools anymore than has already been done. It won't be long before Texas schools will be 50th in everything.

John Fisher

Self - retired

Fort Worth, TX

I urge all Texas Senators and Representatives to OPPOSE SB 3614, which would allow uncertified ministers to act as school counselors. This is merely an easily transparent attempt to sneak religion into our public schools, which would violate the Constitutional Wall between religion and the State.

Thank You,

John Fisher

Fort Worth Texas

Lisa Edmondson
ITT Innovative Teachers of Texas
Pasadena, TX

Need for a Chaplain in Public Schools

My name is Lisa Edmondson and I have been a public-school teacher for thirty years. I teach high school business classes and also co-op where students work part of the day. Since we have come back from Covid, I have seen more depression and mental health issues among the students that I teach. I do believe it is at a height now than at any other time that I have taught school over the last thirty years.

As a teacher there are limits to what we can legally say to help a student where religion is concerned. We can refer a student to the counselor, but here again there are limits to what a counselor can say as well.

I believe there are many students and staff who would benefit from having a chaplain on campus to give comfort to students and/or staff at a difficult time in their life. Just knowing this person is available to give comfort if needed will help many students and staff. This person could help whenever called upon by a student. There are many public places where a chaplain is part of the staff be it a police station or a hospital. These chaplains could be specifically trained to work in a public-school setting and can be used at the request of the person grieving or going through a difficult time.

I am a Christian and I get great comfort from my belief in a higher power. I feel, regardless of the religion followed, most people gain strength from their belief in something spiritual and a chaplain could help them to feel heard. Most of the time people just need someone to listen to them and validate that it is okay that they don't feel okay at that moment. They can help the students and staff through many times of difficult loss whether it is the loss of a grandparent, parent, sibling or friend. A chaplain would be someone people could turn to and get support from or even be referred to other agencies that could help.

I believe having a chaplain on staff at most high schools and other schools would help students and staff deal with difficult circumstances and could perhaps save many lives.

Thank you for your time,

Lisa Edmondson

Carolyn Dower
self, retired nurse
Austin, TX

I vehemently oppose HB 3614. Here are my issues in opposition:

Separation of church and state means no chaplains in schools

It would be harmful to marginalized students (I shudder to think of a conservative religious chaplain "counseling" a student who is LGBTQ

If school gun violence is due to mental health, then why in the world would you defund professionals?

PLEASE VOTE NO ON HB 3613

Noelle McSherry
Self
HOUSTON, TX

This is a bad bill. School counselors undergo training in order to be permitted to work with children. That training and education exists for a reason. Training and education allows the counselors to give children the best possible services. Chaplains do not have the level of training needed to effectively support children. Their lack of training will endanger children. Furthermore, will the chaplain deal fairly with children of a different faith background, or tell them that their problems would be solved if they just convert?

If you want to protect children, the best way to do that is to provide safe and non-judgmental care for them. This bill will actively harm children. Vote no.

Joy Davis
Pure Justice Action Fund
Houston, TX

We oppose this bill. Chaplains may be trained in basic counseling techniques and can provide guidance and support to individuals who are struggling with emotional or spiritual issues from a religious aspect. They do not have the same level of formal training and qualifications as professional counselors. It is also important for chaplains to maintain appropriate boundaries and avoid providing counseling services beyond their scope. What if the chaplain is of a different religion than the child? Children may be experiencing medical issues that they may not receive the support they need from a chaplain. At one time children with Autism (like my son) have been told by religious people to pray Autism away. Our students deserve the best and counselors should be included at all campuses because children nowadays experience even more social issues than when we were growing up. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report, nearly half of LGBTQ students said they had seriously considered suicide. How would a chaplain respond to the needs of a lgbtq student who may need guidance on what is best for them? Counselors are trained to be neutral while chaplains are not.

Martha Stallman, Rev. Dr.
Self
Austin, TX

As a person of faith, I beg you not to endanger the mental health of vulnerable children by denying them access to trained counselors in favor of "chaplains" of unknown motives and loyalties. Such obvious pandering to culture war nonsense is, at best, cowardice. At worst, it's a heresy. Our children are more important than your careers. Please try to remember that.

Cristie Schlosser
self
Dallas, TX

I oppose replacing professional certified school counselors with chaplains. The school counselors have been an integral part of my childrens school experience and have supported their needs.

Meghen Hiller
self
Austin, TX

Dear Sir - I am writing today to vehemently oppose the idea of chaplains taking the place of school counselors in public schools in Texas. School Counselors are trained and qualified to provide the support needed to students. Chaplains belong in places of worship, where they are qualified to provide support to their congregation. The two jobs are not the same. Thank you.

Annette Martinez
Self Retired Teacher
Austin, TX

I am against HB 3614.

As a retired special education teacher, I know firsthand the myriad of duties required of a school counselor. Chaplains are in no way qualified to provide the counseling services mandated by a special education student's IEP. School counselors are expected to write IEP counseling goals for special education students and participate in ARD meetings. In some elementary schools, the counselors are the designated administrator in charge of running the IEP meetings. Chaplains are in NO WAY qualified to provide the specialized services of a school counselor.

If parents want their child counseled by a chaplain, they are certainly free to take their child to that chaplain outside of school or arrange for the chaplain to have lunch with their child on a regular basis as a mentor.

The authors of this bill obviously have absolutely no idea the critical role school counselors have in students' lives. As we discuss the growing mental health problem, especially in light of the effects of the pandemic, the legislature should be looking to add more QUALIFIED SCHOOL COUNSELORS, not chaplains.

Sending in chaplains to "help" also leaves school districts open to lawsuits. How is a Christian chaplain supposed to counsel a Muslim student, or an atheist one?

The students do not have a voice, so I feel compelled to speak for them. Please do not pass HB 3614.

Sarah Kienle
Self
McGregor, TX

I oppose this bill. I am a Christian and also completely support the separation of church and state. This bill is a violation of that.

More importantly, I want my child—and all children—to have access to trained school counselors with degree and the appropriate training to act in this capacity.

Please oppose this bill.

Prasad Paraskar, Mr
Self
Frisco, TX

Not a good move at all. School counselors have very important role in our kid's career and we should focus how we can get ppl having bigger spectrum. This bill is taking us in reverse direction. We should not pass any such bills which will have impact in our future.

Christina Bell
Self; educator
Houston, TX

Chaplains are not trained school counselors and the separation of church and state should be maintained in public schools. I ask that this bill be rejected.

Roma Bhatt
Legacy Community Health
Houston, TX

Hi Representative Hefner. I enjoyed meeting with you in Austin, few weeks ago, along with Lindsay Lanagan, Legacy's Vice President of Government Relations. As a Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor, I would like to share that I am not in support of HB 3614 for the following reasons:

HB 3614 would allow schools to replace certified school counselors with uncertified chaplains.

- Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program.
- There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill.

Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

- Please oppose HB 3614 when it is heard by the Public Education Committee on Thursday.

Thank you for your consideration,
Roma Bhatt

Sherry McCoy
Texas Counseling Association
North Richland Hills, TX

Public schools need certified school counselors, not chaplains, to work with students in all aspects of their academic, social, emotional, and career development from Pre-Kindergarten to 12th grade. School counselors complete rigorous training and hold master's degrees in order to serve the children of Texas in this vital role. A school counselor provides support for student learning and works with all other certified staff members to insure that a student's needs are met. A chaplain does not have a background in classroom guidance, a core component of school counseling. Please oppose HB 3614 when it is heard by the Public Education Committee on Thursday.

Marillyn Mathis, Ms.
self, WRITER
Dallas, TX

Of all the attempts to keep from spending money on education by the State of Texas, this is one of the silliest. Ignoring the education and experience required of school counselors and trying to replace them with chaplains? Please! How about firing all the teachers and replacing them with _____ what? robots? The second half of my objection is that chaplains serve a religious function. I'm sure it would be nice to have someone to pray with the students (assuming they want to be prayed with, and the chaplain matches their religious choice). Chaplains may or may not have training in counseling, and if so, it is likely to be personal counseling, not necessarily academic counseling needed by students. Although they may indeed have life issues they need help with, this is not the primary function of a school counselor, who must be capable of handling a broader range of problems. Good Grief!

Thank you for letting me voice my opinion on this misguided legislative proposal.

Susan Nayak

Self, Website and Management Consulting

Austin, TX

I am a mother of a Texas student, and aunt to 5 additional Texas students.

Please do not support HB 3614. Our students deserve fully paid, fulltime, fully certified school counselors. These individuals have dedicated their education and lives to the betterment of Texas students. They are prepared to meet the varying needs and demands of these young people and children. In a time when we are facing record violence, drug deaths, depression and suicide among our youth, young Texans are in need of increased professional help at school, not kindness and prayers. Chaplains are welcome to work through community churches, perhaps opening counseling and support services through those institutions. But our schools deserve better, much, much better. Increase pay for school counselors. Increase the numbers of counselors in each school. Increase the amount of time school counselors have to meet with students, releasing them from administrative and testing demands. But please do not replace them with untrained, uncertified volunteers.

Benita Garcia

Self/Retire paraprofessional

Houston, TX

Counseling students is not an easy task. Please only allow counselors that have been educated in this area to counsel the students.

Diane Larsen

PAVE

Houston, TX

Professional counselors are a critical support for students. In today's society mental health issues are constantly mentioned as a major problem for young people. Students have access to religious counseling in churches where it belongs-NOT in the schools!!

Krista Bouchard

self - SAHM

Houston, TX

This bill would dismiss the years of training and experience counselors have and instead allow uncertified chaplains to do their job. It would also be a blatant violation of religious freedom, pushing a chaplain's individual religious beliefs on public school students who have varied faiths and cultural practices.

Kathryn Kizer

Self

Austin, TX

Against. Separation of church and state.

Marisa Iannaccone

Self, former teacher

Cedar Park, TX

As a former special education teacher, I strongly oppose House Bill HB 3614 by Hefner, which proposes allowing school districts to employ chaplains to perform the duties of school counselors. While recognizing the value of spiritual guidance and support, it is crucial to have trained professionals who are qualified and equipped to provide comprehensive counseling services in schools. Chaplains may not have the necessary qualifications and expertise to address students' diverse and complex mental health needs, including those with disabilities. Properly trained school counselors play a crucial role in supporting students' emotional, social, and academic well-being, and their expertise should not be replaced by unqualified personnel. Our students' mental health and well-being should be a top priority, and we must ensure that they receive the best possible care from trained professionals in our schools.

Christine Cupp

Self

Plano, TX

I am a constituent and live in zip code 75074. I received my undergraduate education in the Texas Public Education system, as did my son who is currently a high school senior.

The knowledge and training of our certified school counselors is a valuable resource that cannot and should not be undervalued. They are trained professionals who are equipped to deal with many aspects and facets of all challenges and situations that arise when students move through the public education system in Texas.

I do not support replacing trained, certified counselors with chaplains.

Please oppose HB 3614. Thanks for all your hard work to help our students!

Rebecca Barbier

NA

Houston, TX

HB3614 is REDICULOUS!!! Besides the fact that public schools are not supposed to be religious institutions, chaplains are 110% uneducated in the way to counsel students in personal matters and school initiatives. We need mental health resources that are looked at with trust by ALL students, not just those taught to believe in GOD. Remember, your God may not be my God. You keep preaching about mental health and then you want to mess with THE position that focuses on this. Stop bringing YOUR religion in to public schools.

Maithili Bhagat

Self

Coppell, TX

Do not implement HB 3614. We need trained counselors in the schools to help kids.

Maxine Higginbotham

Self/ editors

Northlake, TX

This bill would dismiss the years of training and experience counselors have and instead allow uncertified chaplains to do their job. It would also be a blatant violation of religious freedom, pushing a chaplain's individual religious beliefs on public school students who have varied faiths and cultural practices. It would especially harm LGBTQIA+ students who deserve a trained, accepting counselor to talk to — not a chaplain who may put personal beliefs above their needs.

All of our children deserve trained counselors!

Vote NO for HB3614!

Judy Landress, Mrs

self

Ozona, TX

Letting schools replace their Professional School Counselors with untrained chaplains, is a Very Bad idea, and will lead to multiple law suits.

Cynthia Dwyer
The Tarrant Together Project
Fort Worth, TX

I am writing today to urge you to OPPOSE this bill. I understand that Texas has a dire shortage of school counselors statewide. Per this article <https://cw39.com/news/education/most-states-have-a-school-counselor-shortage-where-does-texas-rank/> Texas ranks 23rd. Per the data the ratio of students to counselors is 392 to 1 or 13,696 counselors to 5,372,806 students. Sadly Texas has become an inhospitable place to teach. Currently Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program. This bill lacks credentials requirements and background checks for chaplains. If I were to apply to work as a substitute teach in Texas a background check and fingerprinting would be required. Why on earth would we invite clergy without background checks to fill open seats to support our most vulnerable? This bill needs to die in committee today. Texas would be better served making education a priority by investing in ALL students and teachers and providing safe places where both can thrive.

Mary Taylor, Ms
The majority of Texans
Ausy, TX

I am against this bill. I want properly teacher trained counselors for the students.
Separation of Church and state is important and I don't want the kids to be indoctrinated with anyone else's religion.

Beverly Roberts
Concerned Women for America of South Texas
Houston, TX

It is clearly proven that religious leaders can be more helpful in leading students (and all people) in the right direction. Please vote YES on this bill so that Christian students can get better advice when seeking help.
Please ignore the yapping about separation of church and state, a ludicrous argument in a nation founded on biblical principles.

MARY MONZON
Self
Pasadena, TX

Counselors need a masters degree. Chaplains etc do not have the proper education to counsel children in the public school setting.
And I don't want religion forced or mentioned to my family at school.

Janice Bragg, Ms
Self
Spring, TX

Vote no! Keep school and church separate!!

Harriet Trevas
Self/retired
Houston, TX

I am urging the committee to vote NO on HB 3614.

If public schools employ chaplains in place of licensed counselors, chaplains could coerce students into participating in religious activities or prayer, which is blatantly unconstitutional. When school employees engage in religious practices, students feel pressured to join in. Hiring a school chaplain from a specific religion also promotes a specific religious perspective and excludes members of the community who have different religious beliefs.

Nancy Friedman
self/retired
Houston, TX

During the Senate's committee hearing on a nearly identical bill (SB 763), Senator Middleton, its sponsor, said that chaplains "represent God in our government institutions." His admission of this bill's intent should be enough to convince you to reject it.

Chaplains should not represent God or any religious entity in any government institution, especially public schools. Doing so would violate the religious freedom of students who hold different views, who might be torn between or confused by discrepancies between beliefs they have been taught in their home or place of worship, and who might feel pressured to suppress their own beliefs to go along. It would violate the religious freedom even of students who share a chaplain's faith but believe it should not be brought into a public school.

It would violate the religious freedom of parents to guide their children's religious upbringing in their own way and in their own houses of worship. Surely you don't believe a state employee should usurp or interfere in a parent's right to raise their children in their own belief system.

It would impermissibly favor chaplains and the religion they represent, as well as religion in general, by exempting them from requirements that others must follow to be employed as counselors under state law. The US Supreme Court's recent cases have talked about treating religion the same as, not differently and certainly not better than, secular ideas and activities. Paying chaplains with my tax payments would also violate Texas' constitutional bar on using state money to support religion.

This is why this measure would be unconstitutional under both the US and Texas Constitutions and why the US Supreme Court continues to respect the right of religious freedom in our country. This is why I urge you to reject this measure.

Kristen Worrall
self
Austin, TX

So many things are upsetting about this bill. Chaplains who are not required to be certified by the state board would be allowed to counsel students? What qualifications would this chaplain need? I can go online and become a chaplain to marry people with zero training. This is negligent and dangerous, to not have a layer of certification to ensure that the professionals counseling students have the required skills to actually, responsibly counsel. Don't get me started on "separation of church and state...."

Karen Corbett
Self
The Woodlands, TX

Counselors vs chaplains?
Yes counselors
No Chaplains

Barbara Garrity
Self- retired educator
Cypress, TX

I am opposed to this bill. School counselors, like other professionals, have to earn their credentials and maintain their certification. Chaplains are not trained to do this work. Our public schools are supposed to be non secular, but chaplains are trained to minister to their faithful. Avoid the inevitable problems by voting against this bill.

D.S. Zamora, Mrs.

Self - Retired

Houston, TX

I am ****OPPOSED**** to this bill.

* No to anyone without certification serving as a counselor. No. No. No.

* It provides too large of an opening for sexual assaults of children in light of the current number of Texas arrests of people posing as clergy for such assaults. Certification keeps this issue more manageable.

How about a bill with proposals for increasing access to certified counselors? Yes, the state would have to spend some \$\$\$ to achieve that. You can get that by eliminating the ripoff we know as STAAR.

Dhiraj Patil

Self

Plano, TX

This HB is against the religious freedom of students and I do not approve this bill. An uneducated chaplin cannot be compared with educated counselor. How will chaplin counsel the non-christian students? Is this some kind of attempt to force Christianity in schools?

Adair Apple

Self/ Marketing & Events

Corpus Christi, TX

My name is Adair Apple. I live in Corpus Christi and I'm opposed to HB 3614. Public school counselors are highly trained educators who are certified as both a teacher and a counselor by the Texas Education Agency. They do so much more than just counsel students. They coordinate and help administer state tests. They refer students for testing. They make sure students with learning disabilities get the accommodations they need. They work on behavior modification plans. In other words, they have a very big job. They are both educators and counselors. I'm not sure what kind of training or certification chaplains have, but I don't feel like they have the qualifications to take on the task of being a school counselor in a public school. Maybe they could serve as a counselor in a private school that doesn't require teachers to be highly trained and certified professionals. Chaplains just don't belong in public schools. Let's spend more money on certified counselors. Let's hire more coals for each campus and let the professionals take care of our kids.

Wiliam Sadler, Rev.

Self

Houston, TX

Allowing chaplains to work in the public school system is an important step toward restoring freedom of religion to our nation's schools,

. Teachers, administrators, and students will all benefit from the work of chaplains. Importantly, chaplains are ecumenical in their efforts; so, the Supreme Court rulings will not be violated.

Please pass HB 3614, and help restore our nation to sanity.

Thank you.

Rev. William Sadler, D.Div.

Ramir Yulatic

Self

Houston, TX

Priests, Rabbi, Imams, monks and others are included.

Debbie Stephens

Self

Houston, TX

NO. Violates separation of church and state.

Terry Kosobud

Retired

Austin, TX

I oppose HB 3614 because this bill allows unqualified people to replace qualified teachers as counselors.

Sandra Silverman, Mrs

Self

Grapevine,, TX

I am appalled at the Texas Legislature actions. Guidance consulted belong in schools working with all kinds of kids. Chaplains belong in hospitals consult ing the sick . You are nothing but a bully! I am a minority religion and I do not want Christian's talking to my children. So diss appointed in all of you. Gay and trans kids are KIDS! Treat them like you would treat all kids

Brittani Scanlan

Self

Porter, TX

Absolutely not beneficial to have an unlicensed person providing therapy to our children!

Paul Yamarick

self

Moulton, TX

I endorse this valuable option. Please pass out of committee HB3614.

Melissas Rowell

self

Houston, TX

I support this bill! Please pass favorably.

Hearing Date: April 20, 2023 8:00 AM

Mark Bedgood
Self-Voice Actor
Corsicana, TX

The duties of school counselors should be performed by people trained in counseling school children. Not only are chaplains unqualified, but this would also give them the opportunity to indoctrinate students.

Wendy McRoberts
Self
Danbury, TX

Absolutely NOT! Chaplains are not mandatory reporters. Child abuse cases could be left up to the discretion of the chaplain. Also religious counseling should not be substituted for mental health counseling in schools. Parents can pay for religious based therapy. No public school funds for religious positions in our schools.

Kristen Harris
Self
McKinney, TX

I am concerned that this would violate our nation's separation of church and state. While I do not mind that the chaplain has his credentials and beliefs, and I think he can surely also become a school counselor, he must go through the same training as they do and keep his religious beliefs out of any counseling duties. We do need far more support at the counseling level in schools (as in most areas in schools), but chaplains are not counselors until they have gone through the same training and are held to the same standards as expressed in our constitution.

Kristina Woods

Self

Cypress, TX

School counselors are critical to the fabric of public schools. They are highly trained, master-degreed employees that support students in a variety of ways. My children's elementary school counselor met with both of my kids weekly. Both of my children are adopted, had emotional challenges, & needed extra support during their school day. She was always there to support them.

My daughter's high school counselor was a Godsend, who allowed my daughter to spend many hours in her office when she was having a hard time coping. She was always there when my daughter needed her & always communicated to me what the situation was.

Replacing school counselors (who provide students with emotional & mental health support, advise students on their high school academic path, college plans, & apprenticeship options, among other things) with chaplains, seems to be akin to the 'indoctrination' that GOP is so concerned about. Substituting Christian clergy for trained & qualified school counselors seems like an effort to create more chaos in public school by removing such student support staff & replacing them with religious people who aren't trained as school counselors.

I am completely opposed to this bill & implore the committee oppose it as well. Christian Chaplains belong in hospitals, branches of the military, & in religious schools & religious workplaces. Public school belongs to ALL children & ALL children in public school should have the benefit of an impartial person who is trained to guide them academically & support them with their emotional & mental health needs. Chaplains are not trained as school guidance counselors & are in no way impartial figures. Randomly putting them in public school in place of our beloved school counselors is just another attack on public ed in the march towards dismantling public schools. Stop this unAmerican, anti-Democratic, pro-segregationist effort now by opposing this legislation.

Thank you.

KIMBERLY CORNETT, MS, LPC, NCC, LCDC

SELF, LPC, LCDC

CORPUS CHRISTI, TX

HB 3614 would allow schools to replace certified school counselors with uncertified chaplains.

Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program.

There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill.

Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

Please oppose HB 3614 when it is heard by the Public Education Committee on Thursday.

Sarah Flukinger
self - professional school counselor
Hempstead, TX

This is not a wise decision. While we as school counselors do see a dramatic increase in crisis issues, the need for professional counseling and these types of issues, a chaplain is not going to replace an actual school counselor in regards to the guidance pieces for TEA graduation requirements, career planning and overall scheduling. Those of us who are professional school counselors have a breadth and depth of school knowledge already, not to mention the extra professional development we require yearly to stay up to date with TEA changes for courses PEIMS coding changes etc. Also, there are many students and families who do not practice an organized religion or if they do, it is not necessarily Christianity, and that can be a deal breaker if the person in need of school counseling feels that religious undertone. If anything, we need more CRISIS counselors in the school to help lessen the load for those of us doing the day to day processes for our students. The crisis issues eat up a lot of our time, so we are very behind. The focus needs to be on attracting and attaining crisis counselors to our area because most people from the private sector do not last long. The pay is terrible for the amount of work and emotional drain that we endure. Those of us who are accustomed to public education have a pretty thick skin. The younger generations are not lasting either.

Cynthia Blake
Texas Counseling Association
EL PASO, TX

As a licensed mental health professional I strongly oppose the proposal of replacing licensed, experienced counseling professionals with chaplains. The implementation of HB 3614 would not benefit our schools or students in any way.

Kathleen Ashton
Self
Denton, TX

Vote Against HB3614

Hello. My name is Kathleen Ashton, and I am a school counselor in Denton ISD. I am strongly opposed to HB3614. I have been a school counselor for 15 years. I went through extensive training to become a school counselor after being a teacher for 13 years. This bill would completely negate the work and training school counselors go through to make sure students have the appropriate care and guidance they need in a school setting. It would be detrimental to students to have someone in a position to work with them on mental health issues, Texas high school graduation requirements and post-secondary options that has not had the specific training needed for each of these extremely important pieces of a student's high school journey.

Allowing this bill to pass would not help the shortage of school counselors but would add additional work to the school counselors where these chaplains are hired. If this bill passes, current counselors would either have to train these individuals in-house or do more work because they do not have the training or skills to do what we are doing already. This would add to our already very busy daily duties and make it even harder for us to take care of students. School counselors are some of the most trained individuals on a school campus. We have more schooling and training than most Principals in our district. Allowing someone to do a school counselors job with no training would completely work in the opposite direction of what you are saying this bill would help.

As your constituent, I respectfully request that you vote against this bill. It goes against everything I have worked for during my 15 years as a counselor and 28 years as an educator.

Thank you for your attention to this matter,
Kathleen Ashton

Kristie Price
Self/School Counselor
Grandview, TX

HB 3614 would allow schools to replace certified school counselors with uncertified chaplains.

Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program.

There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill.

Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

Please oppose HB 3614 when it is heard by the Public Education Committee on Thursday.

Jasmine Wills, Professional Counselor
Comalisd
San Antonio, TX

Absolutely not. This will never work. Counselors are educators as chaplains are not. Counselors are also teachers. This bill will never work...Church and State needs to be separated.

Kimberly Stanaland, counselor, LPC-Associate
self
Elkhart, TX

Why? I can't imagine how this could possibly be a good idea. I have worked, taken many courses, counseled numerous hours, and received many training hours to be proficient at my job. I take great pride in what I do, and I do not want to insult chaplains, but they are unqualified to provide for school age children. I am further insulted that I should complete my training, continue to educate myself, and I could potentially be replaced by a chaplain with a calling, not an education rich in training and working with students. Do better!

Kathleen Brennen
self, stay at home mother
Katy, TX

I am against HB3614.

I understand that there is a shortage of mental health providers, but our kids' mental health is too important to allow unqualified personnel to interfere. I'm only ok with chaplains have gone through child mental health specific training and passed appropriate qualifying exams.

Caryn Berardi
Self, Marketing
DALLAS, TX

Rep. Hefner,

Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program.

There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill.

Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

Please oppose HB 3614 when it is heard by the Public Education Committee on Thursday. Thank you for your consideration.

Sheila Flynn

Flynn Counseling, PLLC and SELF

Livingston, TX

This bill does not allow for the knowledge and expertise counseling gain through a Bachelors and Masters in Counseling / Education to be important. I highly encourage each of you to stop and think about the bias and uneducated person you would be putting into a mental health position. We need counselors to be able to see the student and make educated decisions for their mental health.

This bill seems to be more about bringing God back into schools, and I get that; however, we could do this by adding chaplains into schools as mentors or just chaplains.

I am a counselor and chaplain. As a chaplain first, I would have been IL prepared for students, mental health, and suicide ideation. The suicide ideation / thoughts are addressed in the 6 school districts in East Texas that I am a counselor on a weekly basis in both Special Education and General Education.

THIS IS NOT THE ANSWER! We need to take mental health seriously and pay counselors more to pull in more counselors.

NOTE: I work in 6 Title I school districts in East Texas. I also have a private practice. It is very needed to have qualified mental health counselors.

mercedes deviney

self

corpus christi, TX

I oppose this bill because it is not realistic. As a mental health specialist in a rural public school AND the wife of a pastor, this bill is NOT practical and is doing a disservice for students, school counselors and chaplains. Chaplains ARE not certified or educated to work with adolescents at the capacity of a school counselor. Additionally, some students will be discouraged to talk with a chaplain due to religious beliefs which could them to not seek help. Chaplains would be a great addition to support however NOT as the main support (school counselor).

Caryn Berardi

Self, Marketing

DALLAS, TX

Hello! I mistakenly addressed this to Rep. Hefner in my previous comment. But please see my comments below regarding HB 3614 and I hope you will oppose this legislation.

Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program.

There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill.

Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

Please oppose HB 3614 when it is heard by the Public Education Committee on Thursday. Thank you for your time.

Tracey Burnett-Greenup, LPC

Self, Licensed Professional Counselor

Houston, TX

As a Licensed Professional Counselor, I oppose HB 3614. Please leave the counseling to professionally trained and licensed counselors. Our training includes a Masters degree, extensive hands-on and supervised experience, and thorough background checks. While chaplaincy is a valid and helpful field, the work of chaplains is not transferrable to the work of mental health professionals. This is both irresponsible and dangerous. Thank you, Tracey.

Kinslie Campbell
self, school counselor
Melissa, TX

Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program. There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill. Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling

Gerard Cavanaugh
retired
Burleson, TX

Do not allow any religious persons to act as counselors. They are untrained, agenda driven, and likely to try to use religion as an answer. Religious influencing is insulting to all children and particularly coercive for vulnerable children. Keep the wall between religion and state strong.

Brittany Holden
Self, Teacher and Professional School Counseling Graduate Student
Corpus Christi, TX

As a school counselor in training and a current teacher, I believe that it is important and essential that school counselors be certified and meet all of the current requirements to practice in schools. It is imperative that these requirements stay in place because putting untrained individuals in a position like this can cause harm to the students being seen. Chaplains should only be hired if they go through the proper steps, such as obtaining a master's degree and passing all required exams that are in place for any individual seeking school counselor certification. Putting an untrained and unqualified individual in this position severely discredits the work that school counselors and school counselors in training are doing and could be detrimental to the profession as well as the individuals that are being seen by the untrained and unqualified individuals.

Stephanie Smith
Self
Lubbock, TX

I am a licensed mental health counselor in Texas as well as a strong Christian. Chaplains serve a very important role in our society but they are not appropriate at all to replace school counselors. School counselors have a masters degree in school counseling and are required to have a background in teaching. This makes them uniquely qualified for the role in which they serve. School counselors undergo regular certification and are required to pass a background check, which chaplains in this bill would not be required to do. This is not the answer. Please do not pass this bill. Please invest in our children and schools by getting truly qualified individuals to fill these roles.

Candice Smith
Self
Cedar Park, TX

As a school counselor, this bill would decrease the effectiveness of the comprehensive school counseling program that many schools across the state have implemented. Additionally, the needs of students in the areas of college and career readiness require a well trained, highly educated school counselor to best advise and assist students. Lastly, this is not a solution for a school counseling shortage or a resourceful use of school safety funds. Please do not pass this bill.

Courtney Nuckols

Self & Other Certified School Counselors

Lexington, TX

Professional School Counselors (Certified School Counselors) provide school-wide tier 1 services to ALL students on their campuses, along with specialized tier 2 and tier 3 services to students. Without a degree in Educational Psychology/School Counseling and classroom teaching experience, it would be extremely challenging to provide the services to our students. I can talk to kids about grades, academic goals, and college and career aspirations because I have the knowledge and experience to be able to provide feedback and facilitate students in these conversations. Individuals without the appropriate knowledge and skills in the field of School Counseling and without classroom teaching experience are missing critical components of the job required of a school counselor. A chaplain has a specific set of skills as well, but not the skills that our students need or deserve from someone who would be providing those types of services. Utilizing a chaplain instead of a professional school counselor would also mean that other critical services are not being provided to our students; Social-Emotional Learning, small group counseling, Culture building activities, anti-bullying lessons, etc. The chaplains also do not have the knowledge needed to consult with students about academic and career goals and aspirations, which means that students will not have a school counselor to talk to when making decisions about course selections, pathways, and post-secondary options.

As a PARENT, I do not feel comfortable with my child being provided counseling services by someone who is not certified through SBEC and who is not going to be held to the ethical standards and state requirements that fall under the purview of SBEC. There is transparency with individuals who are certified and monitored through SBEC; parents can look them up, there are federal background checks performed for safety, there is a clear path for filing grievances, etc. With chaplains, that is not the case, and I don't feel comfortable with a district hiring personnel that are not being monitored in the same manner as the certified individuals that are educating and supporting my child.

Amy Rodriguez
self, school counselor
Austin, TX

I am reaching out to you all as members of the House Education Committee to ask you to oppose HB 3614 which is set for a hearing Thursday, April 20, 2023. It is my understanding that HB 3614 would allow schools to replace certified school counselors with uncertified chaplains.

I share the same concerns as the Texas Counseling Association:

The role of a chaplain is primarily focused on providing spiritual guidance and support, which does not encompass the full range of services that students need from their school counselor.

School counselors provide support for academic struggles, career, college and military readiness in addition to working with students on mental health issues.

Chaplains do not have the training or expertise to work with students on academic and career pathways – an essential component of school counseling programs, or to teach the K-12 curriculum required in Ch. 33, Education Code.

Standards for school counselors are comprehensive and set forth in state rule and statute to ensure that students are well served and protected.

Chaplains have no uniform standards. The Common Qualifications and Competencies published by the Board of Chaplaincy Certification, Inc. includes no training on graduation requirements, career pathways, academic procedures, or IDEA and FERPA requirements.

HB 3614 requires no credentials, experience, or training for chaplains hired by school districts. Both the military and health care facilities require a graduate degree and at least two years of religious ministry leadership experience.

I have been a Texas Educator for eighteen years, thirteen of which have been as a school counselor or school counseling supervisor. School counselors have very specific training to not only prepare them for working with students and families who may need a clinical lens and higher level of support, but also to support all students within the academic environment. With the current bill as it stands, chaplains would not have this critical training and experience to understand the broader scope of the school system.

Additionally, there is another bill, SB 798, that would remove the 2 year teacher requirement for school counselor certification. Understanding the critical role of a teacher as well as having classroom experience is essential for a school counselor to be effective in their unique role in any school setting. However, these skills can be taught with time and intentionality. This puts more work on the current school districts and campuses, but I feel we can adapt. I struggle in figuring out how to adapt to HB 3614 as I feel it greatly demotes the meaning and role of the current school counselor.

I sincerely appreciate your consideration as well as your service to the great state of Texas. Please support our school counselors by valuing their unique role in serving Texas Students.

Amanda Davis, Dr.
"Self" Elementary School Counselor
Lake Jackson, TX

I absolutely disagree with allowing chaplains to perform the duties of school counselors. This is 100% against the Constitution of the United States of America. I am a school counselor & to continue to preserve & maintain the freedoms of our country, it is essential that we refrain from this. Chaplains are not required to have the same level of education & training that a teacher or a school counselor is expected to have. This is unacceptable and clearly, someone in power wants to employ their friend in this capacity. I also feel that there is an unspoken agenda to break our educational system from within. What are you going to do when presented with a Chaplain of a religion or faith that openly practices and advocates for things that are currently not legal or otherwise harmful to children and families? This could cause a great deal of discrimination, division, and dissent and could bring additional liabilities to our school system. We must maintain the separation of church and state and also maintain a decent standard of education and training for the professionals that work with our youth. Please feel free to contact me personally & I will be glad to travel to Austin to share my thoughts with you in person.

Alyssa Duncan

Self-Licensed Professional Counselor

Amarillo, TX

As a former public school teacher, and current licensed professional counselor, in the state of Texas I have several concerns about this bill. Our students deserve qualified professional individuals serving their needs. While a chaplain may address many needs for an individual, those needs tend to fall under a spiritual umbrella, and as should not be integrated with a federally and publicly funded institution. Additionally, chaplains are not a regulated station with pertinent education and licensure. Again, I am not dissenting that chaplains serve a role and purpose in community, however, for counseling services we would be inviting unregulated individuals to navigate complex mental health issues in a complex setting such as a school, with a lack of preparation and experience. Let us not allow a shortage of qualified personal cause us to act in the disinterest of our students out of fear that positions will go unfilled. On a separate note, it's fascinating to me that only in recent history did Texas pass legislature regarding the amount of hours school counselors needed to devote to student needs (due to misuse of their position) and yet now we propose legislature that would devalue that action by not requiring licensed individuals in the first place.

I have great respect and admiration for the work chaplains do-however, I also have respect for our students and do not believe that this bill offers the best for them, their needs, or their future.

Robert Storey

self - High School Counselor

Sherman, TX

#1 - separation of church and state

#2 - chaplains are trained to listen in a person-centered manner. That is good for being a chaplain and being a support person, but does not encompass the entirety of the duties of a school counselor

#3 - as a current school counselor, I will have wasted my time and money earning a masters degree and additional certifications to complete the current duties as assigned

#4 - as a coworker, chaplains would not know about the timelines of a school day and what needs to be accomplished and when. Yes, that can be learned, but that takes me and my counseling team away from our duties

#5 - again, separation of church and state.

#6 - there are other ways to address the counseling shortage, like removing the 2 year teaching requirement (which the majority of states in our great country do not have), but getting a substitution like this is just irrelevant.

Megan Medina

Self as a Licensed Professional Counselor and former School Counselor

Midland, TX

This bill puts people into positions for which they are not properly trained. It is also an egregious violation of separation of church and state and threatens to harm the mental health of children and teens who come from different religious backgrounds. Mental health treatment must come from an objective, neutral place. There are plenty of highly trained counselors who are available for these roles. Instead, school districts should hire professional registrars to manage the scheduling and transcribing tasks, so school counselors can be more available to provide the mental health support of their student populations.

Carmen Castaneda, Dr.

Del Valle ISD - School Counselor

Austin, TX

Thank you for taking a moment to read my comment. I am the Coordinator for School Counselors in Del Valle ISD. As a counselor having someone in a position that can yes, help support in one aspect, but can not support in the multiple other aspects of what it takes to be a school counselor is not beneficial to our campuses. School Counselors do not only support with student mental health but they also, help students navigate day to day school, executive functioning, guide them to make good academic decisions so they can be challenged, they work with parents and teachers, they have a comprehensive school counseling program that supports all students by having guidance lessons, they support one another when it comes to students choosing their courses for the next school year. Any school counselor would benefit from another school counselor on their campuses to help support the schoolwide needs of the students, not just a streamlined position. Thank you for you time.

Mamie Miller Prejean
Self- Counselor
Spring, TX

I love my pastor but can't imagine how lot he'd be calculating gpa's for academic all state students or doing a credit check sheet for a move-in from out of state. These are just a few of the "duties" a school counselor must follow. School counselors are highly trained, fully certified, and have a Masters in Counseling to perform the job duty in our wonderful state. We need more school counselor. We need chaplains to pray for our schools.

Michelle Wilson
Texas School Counslors
San Antonio, TX

Allowing chaplains in schools to serve as school counselors is wrong. Not only do chaplains not have their school counselor certification, they do also not have experience as certified teachers who have taught in schools. School counselors have to receive a Master's degree in school counseling, with 700 hours of internship hours. We are qualified in the areas of guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support. We are trained in counseling theories and techniques. We are trained in mental health. We are trained in suicide and self harm protocols. There are so many parts of our job that an outside person would not understand or be able to do. Not to mention, many of our students come from different religious backgrounds, or no religious background. Who would these children see for support? I have absolutely no problem with children seeking the guidance and support of a chaplain OUTSIDE of the school, if that is their choice. However, to move a chaplain into a school to replace a school counselor is not okay.

Angela O'Brien
Self/ School Counselor
Lubbock, TX

Regarding HB 3614, I have very strong concerns about clergy providing mental health support in the schools. Although I would trust my own clergy with my own children, I feel that is a personal preference and a religious decision. My training as a school counselor included a Master's degree that dealt with many aspects of mental health and cultural awareness. Also, students in the schools come from different backgrounds, cultural beliefs, and religious affiliations. I am concerned that some of these may clash in the school setting. Many students are questioning their sexuality, even in elementary school.

If we allow clergy, does that mean from any religion? Can a satanist come in to the school and provide mental health? Can our local cult come in? I am concerned about what precedent that we may be starting by opening this up in the school. If you allowed a satanist to talk to my daughter when she was depressed or anxious, I would freak out on you and the school! Mental health requires some training! As we have seen with these untrained SEL people coming in and providing so-called "Social-Emotional Learning." They are not trained in mental health. They are not trained in dealing with crisis. And we have seen problems arise as a result!

Sarah Shannon-Wildt, Rev.
Self
Austin, TX

As a minister in Texas, I ask you to oppose the bill allowing school districts to employ chaplains to perform the duties of school counselors. Counseling is a different field than chaplaincy, and it is vital to the wellbeing of students to have access to licensed counselors. Thank you, Rev. Sarah Shannon-Wildt

Melissa Waelchli

self

Austin, TX

I oppose this bill as it would allow schools to replace certified school counselors with uncertified chaplains. Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program. There are no such credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill. Additionally, chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling. Our school children are in a mental health crisis and replacing certified and specifically trained professional counselors with chaplains will only further exacerbate the current mental health crisis. What our children need is more access to quality mental health care, not less.

Lori Dunham

Self- School Counselor

Flower Mound, TX

It breaks my heart that the state would consider replacing school counselors with a chaplain. I admire Chaplains but asking them to discuss college plans, schedules, and social and emotional issues with high school students without a religious twist would be impossible. How does this separate God and School? Students will not seek out help with Chaplains because fear of religious back lash. I believe we spend a lot of our time building relationships with high school students so they feel they can come to us for anything without being judged. I believe if you do this at many schools, we will see suicide and social and emotional issues increase in the state. School counselors work hard to complete many different responsibilities, but I truly believe that my students from different religious backgrounds would avoid seeking assistance and parents will not ask for assistance either. Please consider not approving this bill for our children. They need school counselors.

Andrea McGuire

"self"

Driftwood, TX

As a parent, I believe this bill would not serve the children in our schools or the community well. A counselor in the State of Texas has to obtain a master's degree with specific training regarding childhood development, counseling skills, and cultural diversity along with participating in an internship and then 3000 hours of supervised experience with another clinician who has passed boards and national certification. A chaplain has not been trained in childhood education or development and most are self-appointed by members of their church unless they have a degree in theology that does not touch on childhood development or any aspect of psychology from a religious institution.

According to Liberty University Chaplains have the unique opportunity to share the Gospel and provide spiritual guidance outside of the typical church setting. If you have a passion for serving outside of the typical ministry environment and wish to meet the needs of a more diverse group, then Liberty University's online Master of Arts in Religion – Community Chaplaincy is the right degree for you!

Through a functional educational structure in theology, biblical studies, and ministry practice, our M.A.R. in Community Chaplaincy will equip you with the necessary tools for providing biblical guidance and pastoral care. Upon completion of Liberty University's online religion master's in community chaplaincy, you can have the opportunity to explore careers in a variety of fields, from private instruction to chaplaincy.

From that description, this does not provide the proper resources needed for a school counselor.

Why would someone believe a chaplain could provide said services to a child? What you are trying to do is bring religion into the schools as you see fit and this is not right. A parent should have every right to decide who counsels their child and the manner in which is it done. Professional school counselors have the skills and ability to understand the child's psyche and provide the resources necessary to parents to help with child development and chaplains do not.

Because of those reasons, chaplains should not replace professional school counselors and should not be added to this bill.

Andrea McGuire

Courtney Gordon
Texas Counseling Association
Lindale, TX

Chaplains should not be allowed to be employed doing the duties of school counselors. They do not have the training or education required to give appropriate support to the kids.

Jeannie Hoang
Self
Eules, TX

I am opposing this bill because of the following:

HB 3614 would allow schools to replace certified school counselors with uncertified chaplains.

Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program.

There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill.

Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

Sarah Galaivy
Self, therapists
Nacogdoches, TX

While I understand and value the need for chaplains in a variety of settings, respectfully, they are not suited to serve as school counselors. School counselors are required to complete a rigorous masters-level course work, as well as a licensure exam to qualify them to work in this capacity, as well as a thorough background check. While chaplains are well-qualified to serve in several capacities, they are under-qualified to serve as professionals who are responsible for the meeting the vast mental health needs of students. If we allow for this change to happen, we are taking away the potential for the only mental health professional a child may have access to.

Cory Broom
Self - School Counselor
Plano, TX

I vehemently oppose this bill. Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program. There are NO credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill. This is not safe and could potentially put children in harms way. Further, chaplains do NOT have a background in classroom guidance which is a core component of school counseling.

Aimee Bell
Self - Clinical Mental Health Counseling Graduate Student
Plano, TX

HB 3614 would allow schools to replace certified school counselors with uncertified chaplains.

Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program.

There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill.

Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

Please oppose HB 3614 when it is heard by the Public Education Committee on Thursday.

Michelle Gilbert

self

Allen, TX

I oppose this! I am a certified school counselor with 24 years experience. Chaplains do not have to have parent permission to see kids, but school counselors do. I have had several families deny permission due to their cultural background. If a chaplain sees a kid w/o parent permission or school counseling training, I foresee multiple lawsuits against school districts. It is not best practices to have an untrained school mental health provider.

Kelly Warner

Self; professional school counselor

Burleson, TX

This bill violates the separation of church and state. Professional school counselors are trained to provide guidance and mental health services to all students regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, etc. Chaplains have no training in education or in mental health.

Alisha Garcia

self

Dallas, TX

As a licensed mental health professional, it is incredibly irresponsible to not employ licensed professionals. The family and students have the option to go to a church to get counsel and it should not be at a public school.

Michele Adkins

Self

San Antonio, TX

Counseling provides the tools and insights to manage mental health issues. Ultimately, counseling empowers students to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. School Counseling requires a minimum of a master's degree along with a significant amount of internship hours and experience. Some of that experience is in the classroom teaching for a minimum of 3 years. How could we even consider lowering the standard for our schools and students. **DO NOT PASS THIS BILL**

Protect our schools and students with professional and educated school counselors who are educated and meet teaching requirements.

Leah Hartley

Shepherd ISD

Shepherd, TX

I do not think that chaplains are trained appropriately to be school counselors. School counselors deal with a variety of issues that require training and collaboration with fellow school counselors. I understand that Chaplains have some training, but it is from a religious aspect and not all people want their children to receive religious counseling.

Ashley Frutos
TSCA/Humble ISD
Houston, TX

Allowing chaplains to perform the duties of school counselors is unethical and irresponsible. As a Professional School Counselor, I have completed a master's degree in counseling, eight years of teaching experience and completed a supervised internship as a counselor for 18 months. A comprehensive counseling program requires completion of a minimum of 4 classroom guidance lessons per class per year and on my elementary campus we have completed 280 lessons this year. Another component of a comprehensive counseling program is individual academic planning related to graduation, transcripts, educational endorsements and College, career, military readiness. We are also required to have knowledge of mental health disabilities and appropriate educational interventions to put in place in the classroom for section 504 recommendations. When working with responsive services, we must provide an environment that is non-biased when assisting students and staff who are in crisis. These crisis are including completing risk assessments to determine harm to self or participating on the safety team to determine if a student shows a risk to harm others. As an educator, I have to complete a background check upon employment unlike a chaplain who does not have any credentials or background checks. If this bill passes, I believe that it will be extremely detrimental to the academic and mental health needs of students in the state of Texas. As a Christian, I believe that I was called to be a professional school counselor the same way I feel that a Chaplain is called to give others spiritual guidance, performing religious rites, conducting worship services and providing confidential spiritual counseling through their church.

Stacie Maples
Cleburne ISD
Cleburne, TX

STOP THIS NONSENSE!!!! Counselors went to college for 4-6 years for a reason!!! This is the most absurd thing I have ever heard of in education. Chaplain is not qualified to do what school counselors have been trained to do!!!

Katelyn Jones
Self and Terrell ISD Counseling Team
Wills Point, TX

As a school counselor, I oppose HB 3614. I dedicated time and effort to learning my job and I work hard to grow in expertise daily in order to best serve the students of my campus. By allowing chaplains to perform my job, corners would be cut that pose risks to student safety and potentially harm many. Chaplains are not mandated reporters, which would mean that information could be withheld allowing children to fall victim to ongoing abuse of many types. Additionally, if we're not to allow prayer and scriptures in our school, why would we want to hire religiously affiliated personnel? I am not against religion, but there's been a time and place for that previously determined. If we're going to lessen requirements, why not just open the door to any old Joe who thinks they can do my job. Chaplains are trained, but not to adequately provide unbiased advice and support for students that is separate from their own personal beliefs which is a big part of school counselor training at the Master's level.

Natalie Parmenter, Licensed Professional Counselor
Self - Licensed Professional Counselor
Austin, TX

This bill would undermine the integrity of the role and the profession in itself. A chaplain does not acquire the same training necessary to support the full range of tasks that a licensed professional provides. In no other area of mental health is a uncertified or unlicensed professional able to perform the same tasks. There are strong ethical reasons for licensing in the field of counseling, and children are a vulnerable population. Diluting the care to a vulnerable population is at least ill-advised and at its worst harmful to students. A chaplain may have overlap in some care but is in no way a replacement, equal, or equitable support.

Jennyfer Rosado
self, mental health therapist/LPC
Wichita Falls, TX

Please oppose HB 3614 on Thursday for the following reasons:

HB 3614 would allow schools to replace certified school counselors by the State board of Education with uncertified chaplains. Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program. There are NO education or prior training prerequisites required to become a chaplain in Texas, which means anyone could become a chaplain and then counsel children. Furthermore, Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, trauma, developmental or growth and development training, or regulation skills which are components learned in a counseling program and specifically classroom guidance to a school counselor program. There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill.

Rachel Sloan, Dr.
Self- LPC-S, LMFT-A, current private practitioner, former school counselor
Frisco, TX

The specialized training school counselors receive is absolutely critical to the efficacy of the services they provide students and the duties they perform on a campus. Because chaplains are neither trained nor certified in school counseling they are de facto unqualified to meet the need of students who need a highly trained, certified, mental health professional in a school setting. A school is not a church, students are not congregants, standards for school counselors must remain high.

Denise O'Bannon
self/elementary school counselor
Lipan, TX

Please vote against this bill as it will be detrimental to students. Chaplains are not required to have the knowledge or training that school counselors have. Matter of fact, chaplains are not even required to have a high school diploma. Anyone can be labeled a chaplain. On the other hand, school counselors must not only have a high school education, they must have a masters degree specifically in school counseling. During grad school, school counselors are taught researched driven strategies to address individual student needs. Chaplains have none of this education. There is also a concern of what religious endorsements chaplains could have. If one religion is allowed into schools, then all religions must be welcomed. The primary role of a chaplain is to indoctrinate their religious views onto others. What recourse will parents have when one of these untrained chaplains presents religious ideations that are not in line with the parents' religious views? School districts will find themselves tangled up in unwanted lawsuits. Carpenters are not allowed to be orthopedic surgeons just because they can use a saw. Neither should chaplains be allowed to counsel students just because they are good listeners.

Diane Hoffman
Self/ Professional School Counselor
Mt. Pleasant, TX

Please oppose this legislation. School counselors are required to have a Master's Degree in School Counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program. We also have a minimum of 3 years of teaching experience, which makes us highly qualified.

Currently, there are no credentials or background checks required on Chaplains in this legislation. This leaves our students at potential risk.

Also, chaplains have no background in classroom guidance which is a core component of school counseling. Having a chaplain on campus should not be able to replace a Professional School Counselor. They simply do not have the qualifications to act as one.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do the right thing and oppose this bill.

Katasha Varner

Self

Fort Worth, TX

I oppose this bill. It is an insult to Professional School Counselors and the training we receive to allow this. A chaplain should not be counseling a student at any grade level in a public school. Professional School Counselors have training in cultural competencies, relational aggression, career counseling, and a plethora of other areas covered in our training programs. We conduct violence risk assessments as well as suicide risk assessments to students. Do not diminish the education and training of School Counselors by allowing untrained and uncertified individuals to attempt to do our delicate at times jobs.

Nadia Green

Self

Frisco, TX

This proposed bill is very problematic and concerning. Chaplains are not trained in classroom counseling and by allowing the replacement of school counselors, you will be further harming students in our schools beyond the current lack of funding and care that they receive. As a Texas resident, I oppose this bill and ask that you vote against it.

Tennille Johnson

Self

Spring, TX

Dear Representatives,

In reference to HB3614, respectfully, a chaplain and a school counselor are not interchangeable. School counselors are trained in multiple areas: human development, group counseling, career and vocational counseling, assessment, crisis and trauma counseling, individual counseling of children and adolescents, cultural counseling, etc. and have a much more holistic approach in helping children. It is absolutely unconscionable to consider that a chaplain could handle all of the facets of being a school counselor. In addition, it is beyond unethical. Working with children is a very delicate process, and a child in crisis could be irreparably traumatized by someone who lacks proper training.

A school counselor is required to have a Master's degree in school counseling, 2 years or more of teaching experience, be fingerprinted through TEA, and pass the TeXes 252 test. Many school counselors extend their training to earn their LPC (licensed professional counselor) title through the Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council, which requires passing the National Counselor Examination, the Texas Jurisprudence Exam, and 3,000 hours of professional supervision.

A chaplain should not be a direct school district employee, and certainly not in the role of school counselor. While chaplains are important to spiritual development, this is best achieved on a strictly voluntary basis, and it must be approved by individual school districts. There are many, many issues that could arise if this bill is passed; consequences could be beyond what we can even foresee at the moment.

If you are looking for those in the helping profession to help with school counselor vacancies, please consider Licensed Professional Counselors or Licensed Clinical Social Workers as a FIRST option. Perhaps consider making it easier for LPCs and LCSWs to become school counselors; after all, they've had over 3,000 hours of supervision to earn that title.

I urge you to weigh the options more fully and reconsider this bill.

Sincerely,

Tennille Johnson

Maria Brockie, Lead Counselor

Fort Bend ISD

MISSOURI CITY, TX

Hello,

I appreciate that you are trying to give schools options to hire Mental Health professionals to serve their students. Chaplains aren't Mental Health Professionals. One definition of a Chaplain is: "a member of the clergy attached to a private chapel, institution, ship, branch of the armed forces, etc". The key word here is clergy. All of the definitions I read refer to "spiritual care", "religious needs" or "religious care" of individuals. While I appreciate a spiritual connection for my personal life, it is totally inappropriate in a public school setting. Public schools are not religious institutions.

It is critical that School Counselors have working knowledge of school systems, how they function, and knowledge of human development, in order to provide proper support to students, teachers, and parents. School counselors have extensive training (Bachelor's and Master's degrees) in education and have at least three years' experience as a classroom teacher. All School Counselors are certified by the State Board of Education. Certification ensures that School Counselors are held to high standards of training and are bound to ethical standards to help ensure that services are provided with fidelity and integrity. All of these standards are absolutely necessary to be able to serve the diverse student population in our public schools. The hiring of Chaplains would have no such standards connected to the State Board of Education.

School Counselors have many additional duties that don't relate to mental health, such as scheduling, administration of 504 programs, GT programs, attendance at Special Education meetings, administration of mentoring programs, character education programs, college, career and military readiness, transcript review to assure graduation requirements re being met, and test score review with students and parents, just to name a few. There are many others. Having a foundation in, and experience with education is essential to the faithful administration of all of these kinds of programs.

I would appreciate you reconsidering HB3614. It is not educationally or ethically sound.

Thank you,

Maria Brockie, M.Ed.

Lead Counselor, Billy Baines Middle School

Fort Bend ISD

Charlene Shafer

Self, retired teacher

Cypress, TX

Chaplains should NOT be acting as school counselors. We do not need or want people counseling from a religious point of view. Our schools serve students from multiple religious backgrounds & should be counseled by nondenominational, trained professionals.

Provide adequate funding to hire & retain appropriate counseling services.

Tashea Walker

TCA

Fresno, TX

As a previous school counselor, I do not think it would be beneficial to hire chaplains to be replaced as a school counselor. It's enough that school counselors do not always spend their time "counseling" student but to hire someone who is not licensed or have knowledge of the school system would be a disaster. What are chaplains supposed to do if a child is stating that they want to harm themselves? Pray? By no means do I now believe in God but as a previous school counselor and a mental health professional, I can assure you that praying will not help the student in that moment. What if there is something more severe such as depression, symptoms of anxiety, or trauma in the child's background? How will a chaplain help that student. What resources or training will be given to them? Because they are not licensed they would not be required to ensure the child's safety or make proper recommendations to the child's family to prevent further damage. Lastly, what type of background checks or experience will be required for these chaplains? As someone who used to work in the school system, it is important for someone to have experience and understanding of how the system works. My prayer is also that a background check is done because so many "spiritual leaders" use that to their advantage and manipulate children and their families. I believe that HB3614 should not pass and something should be done about the lack of school counselors in the school, how much testing/scheduling they are required to do v. actually counsel, and how much they are compensated for their work and level of education/licenses required.

Sheri Cobarruvias

Sheri Cobarruvias, MS, LPC-S, NCC

Universal City, TX

Please oppose HB 3614! Uncertified Chaplains have no place in the role of school counselors. The position of school counselor requires very different qualifications that chaplains do not possess. Professional School Counselors must have at least a master's degree in counseling with a concentration in school counseling and classroom experience; however, chaplains do not have the required education and classroom experience needed to act as a school counselor. Additionally, there are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill, which is greatly needed for the safety of the children being served. Please oppose HB 3614. Thank you!

Rebecca Cline, Educator

Self - Educator

San Angelo, TX

As districts and campuses work to implement robust Comprehensive School Counseling Programs set by HB 18, to best serve our students academically, socially and emotionally now is not the time to undermine this work by allowing chaplains to serve as school counselors. Chaplains may be able to counsel their parish and provide spiritual guidance, but how will they have the knowledge and expertise in helping students navigate school without bias. I am asking for the Public Education Committee to please consider the professionalism of school counselors and directors of the counselign programs, and remember their value in our school system. There is absolutely no need for chaplains to be in the education system.

Denise Solis

Self-Professional School Counselor

Austin, TX

I oppose the proposition to employ chaplains in place of school counselors. I have been a school counselor for 6 years. My knowledge of child development, years in classroom and all of my masters work has been vital in helping me support our students to grow academically, socially and emotionally in order to be successful in the classroom and beyond. Furthermore we take classes and professional development in cultural proficiency, ethics and equity building a chaplain will not be able to avoid their beliefs to influence what is best for the student. The definition of chaplain is "A chaplain is, traditionally, a cleric, or a lay representative of a religious tradition, attached to a secular institution, or a private chapel." How can a person that is a representative of something avoid placing their influence on students, staff and caretakers?

Jillian Summar

Self

AUSTIN, TX

HB 3614 would allow schools to replace certified school counselors with uncertified chaplains.

Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program.

There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill.

Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

Please oppose HB 3614 when it is heard by the Public Education Committee on Thursday.

Jenn Zatopek

Self - Licensed Professional Counselor

Fort Worth, TX

Dear Members of the Public Education Committee:

As a Licensed Psychotherapist, I'm asking that you do not allow HB 3614 to pass. Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program. There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill. Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling. It's understandable that one might want a spiritual director to help students at a school, but a Chaplain's focus is on spiritual guidance, not psychological care. They do not have training in psychological counseling, which means they won't be able to properly assist students in need of help for emotional challenges.

Please continue to employ School Counselors to support the psychological needs of students in public schools. They have the knowledge, training, and expertise needed to help students navigate their public educational experiences. With the recent uptick in gun violence at our schools, it's imperative to keep School Counselors at their posts to identify problem behaviors and provide solid and evidenced-based interventions to help.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service! I am grateful for your wise leadership and know you will make the best decision for our students!

Sincerely,

Jenn Zatopek, MS, LPC, EMDR

NGINA HARDY

Self (Professional School Counselor)

Richardson, TX

As a devout Christian, I have been an educator for 23 years and during that time I have never been allowed at any point to bring anything in regards to my religious beliefs into the public, private or charter school systems yet there is a willingness to allow a chaplain, to come and . It is amazing to me how disposable many politicians feel that educators are but have never taken the time to walk a day in our shoes. The relationships and guidance professional school counselors provide shouldn't be minimized or removed from schools. Students benefit from being supported academically, emotionally, with various social challenges and relating educational agendas to their success in the future. We encourage students to be motivated learners and facilitate their exploration of post-secondary educational options including; vocational/trade schools, community college, universities, career choices and military branches. School counselors also provide classroom, small group or individual instruction that helps children build social emotional learning concepts, social and everyday life skills. Professional school counselor are irreplaceable and I really hope our value are truly understood and that this Bill is reconsidered .

Tabitha Davis
Tulia High School
Happy, TX

It is CRUCIAL that counselors spend at least 3 years in the classroom so they are able to understand the role of a teacher in the school environment.

Allison Komorowski
self, school counselor
Fort Worth, TX

I am vehemently opposed to the bill that would allow school districts to employ chaplains to perform the duties of school counselors. I have the fortunate opportunity to have a master's degree in chaplaincy and another one in education, specifically as a school counselor. I can assure you that my seminary degree did not prepare me for the very specific duties of a school counselor. As a school counselor, we are aware of the many graduation requirements of students, college and career opportunities in the current education and job market, resources within the community to meet the specific needs of students and their families, and so many more things that are specific to the school setting. Chaplains are wonderful individuals, but their training is in the hospital, military, or prison setting. It is never meant to be in the school setting as a professional school counselor. Please respect the education and training that school counselors receive that is specific to their job responsibilities. This cannot easily be replaced by another profession.

Jenn Zatopek
Self - Licensed Professional Counselor
Fort Worth, TX

Dear Members of the Public Education Committee:

Hi! My name is Jenn Zatopek, and I'm a Licensed Professional Counselor. I'm asking that you please oppose HB 3614 when it is heard by the Public Education Committee on Thursday. Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program. There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill.

It is imperative to keep school counselors at their posts in public schools, so they can provide evidenced-based interventions that can help students deal with the emotional problems that arise. While it is perhaps understandable to want chaplains to help, their primary focus is on the spiritual guidance of others, which means they don't have any knowledge, training, and expertise that licensed school counselors have. School counselors are the best for the role of providing psychological guidance and care for students in our public schools. It's especially wise to keep school counselors at their post because of the recent uptick in gun violence at our schools.

Thank you for your time with this request! And thanks for your leadership and service!

Sincerely,

Jenn Zatopek

Sharon Ward, MS, LPC NCC
Sharon L. Ward, MS, LPC, NCC Mental Health Counselor in Private Practice
Weatherford, TX

Please do not support this bill. Chaplains do not have the training and credentialing required to address the wide variety of cognitive, psychosocial, behavioural and interpersonal challenges faced by youth. Additionally, as public education is something that is provided through state agencies, this seems to be a clear violation of church and state overlap. Furthermore, in order for there to be parity and a reduced risk of discrimination, religious personnel for all faiths should be available and I believe that is beyond the scope of the school setting. Parents are responsible for the religious training of their children. This should not be taken out of their hands. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Emma Pineda
Self, LPC and LMFT
Irving, TX

I do not agree with this bill as an LPC and LMFT working in a school district. Chaplains do not have the same training nor education that we do when it comes in regards to mental health and emotional issues. Chaplains should not be allowed on campuses. This is a violation of church and state. This does not account for students who do not adhere to Christianity. Students should be seen my people who can remain neutral and empathic instead of telling them their religion is a reason for their supposed issues. Counseling in schools must remain neutral and it must be offered by people that have received extensive training. This bill is upsetting and I cannot believe it is being proposed. Shame on the Cole Hefner for proposing this bill. This bill has no right to exist.

Jennifer Parker
self
New Braunfels, TX

I do not feel that allowing school districts to employ chaplains is what is best for the school system. One of the roles of a chaplain is to provide confidential counseling, however, the training required to be a school counselor is not something that a chaplain has prepared for. A person that chooses to go to school to be a school counselor should be the one providing the school counseling services. Opening up the position to a person with a completely different career will only muddy up the understanding and definition of what a school counselor does. This will confuse families, decision-makers, policy-makers, and other future school counseling professionals.

A few other reasons why I disagree with this bill are no oversight by a certification board, no formalized education on how to manage a comprehensive school counseling plan, lack of knowledge around school systems/graduation pathways, diminishes the current profession of school counselors, and confuses the line between religious affiliation and public education.

Samantha Plevney
The well-being of children
Austin, TX

This is a terrifying idea in a public school setting. School counselors are highly trained staff who help ensure the physical and emotional safety of their students. Chaplains will not be required to report suspected abuse, leaving many students vulnerable to continued physical and sexual abuse. Please consider the safety of austin students when reviewing this.

Danae Crume
Self, Licensed Professional Counselor
Coppell, TX

School counselors require specialized training and skills that I, as a specially trained Licensed Professional Counselor, are unable to perform. Our children need better support with specialized training and skills. And parents should be made known of contact made with support staff and their child at school

Virginia Gibson
School Counselors
Temple, TX

I believe one of the most invaluable parts of being a school counselor is having extensive experience inside the classroom and the graduate level education of human development. While members of the clergy do have extensive experience guiding people, it is through the lens of the the spiritual and religious, not on a level that understand the educational system, human development, or child/adolescent behavior. Additionally, the assumption seems to be the chaplains would be of the Christian faith which is a direct violation of the separation of church and state. I would also like to ask the congress people in favor of this bill if they are willing to have chaplains of the Buddhist, Sikh, Muslim, Wiccan, or Pagan faiths as chaplains. It would stand to reason representatives of different faiths would like the chance to chaplain and should have an equal opportunity to work.

Paul Irby
Self
Tuscola, TX

I have the benefit of being both an ordained minister and a licensed professional counselor. I value the roles of both chaplains and certified/licensed mental health counselors. The role in the school district would be best served by the latter because of specialized training and the rigor required in obtaining state licensure. Understanding the breadth of the mental health crisis facing students most chaplains lack the training and experience dealing with clinical levels of mental health needs. Additionally, there are some students who would bristle at the thought of sharing their struggles with “a person of the cloth” which would lead to inauthentic/shallow levels of understanding and intervention which means never truly treating the underlying issues. By virtue of the difference between pastoral counseling and clinical counseling, I would hope our state would want to equip our school districts to face the depth of this mental health crisis with the absolute best trained and knowledgeable professionals. I would encourage “no” votes on HB 3614.

Jennifer Jablonski
Self
Jonestown, TX

This is a horrible idea and should not be passed under any circumstance.

Danelle Sanders
Self, lawyer
Houston, TX

- Professional School Counselors must have a master’s degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program.
- There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill which is a direct endangerment to all children in public schools.

Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

Additionally, I feel that students struggling with LGBTQ or ANY other religion would not feel comfortable to speak freely with a Chaplain in a public school. Separation of a church and state is still in the Bill of Rights and with very good reason.

I personally struggled enough in high school with my faith, sexuality, and goals without the interjection of a chaplain’s guidance against my will.

Rebekah Kneupper
Self
Grandview, TX

As a certified professional school counselor and a person who has been a part of the education system for over 15 years. The idea that HB 3614 would allow schools to replace certified school counselors with uncertified chaplains is absurd.

To become certified as a professional school counselor I obtained a master’s degree, took 48 hours of classes, completed 600 hours of a practicum with students, took a state certification test, and had to be a classroom teacher for a minimum of 3 years.

Counseling is in-depth and requires a lot of training and professional development. We follow The Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs; this book is 192 pages of vital information. Containing information and structure to the development of children, involving Guidance Curriculum, Responsive Services, Individual Planning, and System Supports.

Allowing Chaplains who have absolutely no experience working in a school setting and no experience working with children in a school capacity, you have slapped many professionals in the face. Also, not having requirements for credentials or background checks, everyone else in the school system must meet requirements, why not the Chaplains?
You have made certified professional school counseling into a joke, merely trying to check boxes.

Kahla Scrivner
Self/ High School Counselor
Lewisville, TX

I am appalled that this bill is something being considered in 2023. Where is separation of church and state here? I am a certified public school counselor in the state of Texas. I have a Bachelors degree in human development and family studies. I taught in the classroom for five years (a minimum of 2 years teaching experience is required per the state of Texas). And then I earned my Masters degree in education for school counseling. Yet none of this matters according to this bill? I have spent thousands of dollars to earn these degrees to be qualified in the state of Texas to do my job. I learned ethics. I learned protocols. I learned valuable theories and self regulating tools to provide students. I am walking with students on their own personal roads helping them with current emotional states, post secondary options, life skills, and so much more. Allowing Chaplains to enter this realm with zero background checks, zero knowledge in the field, zero qualifications or certifications is unbelievable. What a huge slap in the face. I have worked tirelessly for years to earn this position and I sure am not going to stand by and watch Chaplains be able to earn my title, too for simply being an official of a church. I have zero faith that Chaplains would be able to walk with students down their own paths without self imposing their religiously views on students.

Michael flynn
self
Livingston, TX

If we have a separation of church and state, then why are we stating that religious chaplains, whom are not required to possess a degree of any sorts, now eligibility to work with students in the school district? I do not want or desire this. Please reconsider.

Donald Zeek
Self
Dickinson, TX

It has always been good to have paid chaplains in our federal and state legislatures and in the ranks of our nation's armed forces. It is time that we not only allow but encourage school districts to employ chaplains in public schools. There is plenty of evidence that students behave more positively with the counsel and even just the presence of school chaplains. I strongly support this legislation.

Leia Morris, Dr
Self - health tech
Austin, TX

Chaplains have a religious agenda which is not allowed in public schools. For people who want to promote Christian religious views in schools, this would also pave the way for lawsuits for discrimination against Muslim clerics, rabbis, Satanists, Wiccans, pagans, etc. School counselors are certified according to independent criteria and do their jobs without bias. We should keep this requirement.

Greg Flynn
Concerned Adult
Kingwood, TX

Chaplains are not trained as counselors. Keep church and state separate.

Nelva Cain
self
Livingston, TX

As a Christian I feel that chaplains are great to talk to but they are not trained to deal with many issues that arise in todays society. Please do not allow this bill to pass.

Amanda Flores
self - school counselor
Merkel, TX

Please vote no to HB 3614.

School counseling is more than providing responsive services to students in crisis. We are required to create and lead a comprehensive school counseling program to meet students academic, social/emotional, and college and career needs. Simply put, chaplains lack the proper training and credentials to do the job. School counselors hold masters' degrees specific to our field which may include 60 hours of graduate coursework. This includes training on assessments and screenings, research analysis, substance abuse, counseling theories, and much more. We have been supervised, licensed, and vetted - as we should be.

Anne Newman
Self
FAIR OAKS RANCH, TX

Please support HB 3614.

Traci Newhart
Self- Educator
Burleson, TX

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE. Counselors are certified educators that understand schools and their students!!!

Stephanie Pierce
Self - School Counselor
Mason, TX

As a current school counselor at a public school, I adamantly oppose this proposal to allow chaplains to perform the duties of school counselors. Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program. However, there are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill. School counselors work closely with students every day, and oftentimes on a one-on-one or small group basis. How are we protecting students if we are not requiring credentials or background checks? Furthermore, classroom guidance is an important element of the counseling curriculum. Chaplains do not have training or a background in classroom guidance.

Cynthia Orosco
self- school counselor
Conroe, TX

While chaplains play a very important role in the community, chaplains are not qualified to perform the duties of a school counselor. They do not have the educational background or experience when it comes to academics, social and emotional learning of students. Schools range from very small to very large with some schools having over 4,000 students. Chaplains cannot conduct the necessary duties- such as dealing with a suicide ideation and following the protocol set forth by the district. The conversations that need to take place and not having the background to talk to parents/ guardians about resources and urgency of the situation. Chaplains do not have the academic background to hold mandatory meetings with students set forth by the state to guide them regarding post-secondary. Chaplains do many great things in the community, but we do not need to bring them into the schools to perform the duties of a school counselor.

Nikea Basher
Self - education
Fort Worth, TX

Please vote against this bill. The bill does not require any specific qualifications or training for chaplains. School counselors, educators and other professionals who provide direct services to students have to meet rigorous certification standards that ensure they are prepared to address a wide range of student needs. Parents are not required to give consent for their students to meet with a chaplain. Parents are required to give consent to meet with mental health professionals and to participate in most campus-based events.

Holly Barrett
self/Public Middle School Counselor
Georgetown, TX

I strongly disagree with the proposal to employ chaplains as school counselors. School Counselors have a wealth of education and school experience (including teaching) that allows them to implement the Texas Comprehensive School Counseling model adopted by the Texas Education Agency. The assumption in the bill is that chaplains might be better suited to support students experiencing emotional upset. However, school counselors are trained mental health professionals who have the qualifications to either provide support to the student or access the appropriate community resources. Chaplains do not have that education or training. Furthermore, public schools must maintain separation of church and state--not sure how chaplains could maintain that separation. School counselors are tasked with much more than providing mental health support to students in need, and chaplains would have no clue how to implement a counseling program and run it effectively--classroom guidance lessons, college, career, and military readiness, master scheduling and course advisement, discipline consultation for teachers, students, and parents, 504 plan and Special Education referrals, to name a few. HB 3614 fails to acknowledge the experience, education, and contributions of school counselors. Replacing counselors with chaplains is an ignorant suggestion and a very bad idea for countless reasons.

Shawna Munson, Director
Serenity House Counseling
Livingston, TX

School counselors are vital to student wellbeing and have the training to attend to urgent/emergent mental health needs. Chaplains do not receive this training as a part of their curriculum. Spiritual advisors are important and can be made available as a separate part of the faculty but should not be made in place of school counselors or crisis counselors on the campus. These should be two distinct positions if made available and should not be interchangeable.

Micheil McCune
Self / School Counselor
Montgomery, TX

I oppose this Bill. Chaplains can not perform the duties of school counselors. School counselors must receive at least a Master's degree and work as a teacher before transitioning into a counselor role. Doing so helps school counselors gain the knowledge needed to work with students, families, staff, and Texas graduation requirements. The school counselor's role isn't only to help students struggling through mental health issues, but to also help students plan their futures and provide them the framework to get there. If this bill were to pass, it would be a slap to all school counselors' faces. Texas has a teacher shortage, could you imagine how many current counselors would leave their profession if passed? This would devastate the school climate and be destructive to the students that need school counselors.

Dana McAdoo
Self/School Counselor
DeKalb, TX

I have been employed as school counselor for 17 years and have served students at every grade level. I have made education my career and believe it is my calling. I believe that the training required to become a chaplain does not compare to the training required for a school counselor. I feel like the proposal to fill school counseling openings with chaplains, might be a move to fill spots with warm bodies. I would ask those proposing this bill...Can chaplains administer a comprehensive school counseling program? Professional school counselors are trained to do this, and chaplains are not. The definition of a chaplain is a clergyman of a branch of military, an institution i.e. hospitals/prisons, who provide spiritual care for individuals. I am a Christian and believe in Christian values, however, providing spiritual care is not what we are tasked to do as school counselors. We support students in many, many ways as outlined in the state requirements and providing spiritual care is not one of them. We refer students to outside agencies as necessary. We collaborate with all stakeholders, like family/guardians, teachers, administrators with the goal of supporting them through their academic and social/emotional well-being.

Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program. Will Chaplains be required to complete this training since their training is not the same? There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill. Although most all schools require a background check for employees, chaplains are not educators and do not have a background or training in child development.

Lastly, will chaplains be trained to provide classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling. This requires classroom management skills as well and deep knowledge and experience working with students.

Please oppose HB 3614 when it is heard by the Public Education Committee on Thursday.

Dana McAdoo

Jana Lowe, Superintendent
Leggett ISD
Leggett, TX

Putting uncertified and untrained chaplains to replace certified and licensed counselors in the school system is a ridiculous idea. I do not know why anyone would assume that a chaplain would automatically have the skills needed to serve in a school counselor position. These are not interchangeable jobs. They have very different job skills. Please do not put our students at risk by assuming anyone with no training or certification can do this job.

Shemise Michael
TCA
Fresno, TX

Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

I oppose HB 3614 w

Erin Enriquez
self/high school counselor
Conroe, TX

I am a certified high school counselor and I DO NOT agree with this bill. I am a Christian but I worked very hard to obtain my professional school counseling degree. Every year I attend trainings to ensure that I am as prepared as possible for every student that I may encounter in my office and the hallways. If these chaplains are allowed to enter our school with no training or certification necessary, our students will be getting misinformed about so many different topics. If they would like to be school counselors, they can go through the rigorous training and education that we have gone through to join alongside us.

Ahou Line, Dr.
University of North Texas/ TCA Member
Frisco, TX

To whom it may concern,

I strongly oppose Bill HB 3614. I am a certified school counselor, licensed professional counselor, and registered play therapist in Texas. I have been not only a k-12 educator (I taught 7th and 8th grade English in a Title 1), but I have also spent the last 8 years practicing mental health. Most importantly, I am a mother with a child who will attend Texas schools.

This bill is an absolute outrage. As a parent, the idea that a certified school counselor could be replaced with someone who was untrained to meet the mental health needs of my child is absolutely unacceptable. With the mental health crisis we are facing in schools today, how is this the answer? How is an untrained chaplain going to be prepared to meet the needs of a child who is actively suicidal? How can this chaplain provide mental health services when there is a death within the school? How can this person provide guidance within the school system and with college and career readiness when they were never an educator themselves? I am proud to live in a state that requires 2 years of service as an educator before being able to be certified as a school counselor. This requirement allows school counselors to maintain professionalism, experience within the school system, and obtain a master's before being able to hold a role where they can be the difference between life and death for children. This role is not one to take lightly. Not only are you undermining the profession with this proposed bill, but it is undermining the work of educators and schools as a whole.

In my work through my doctorate, I have also had the privilege of educating future school counselors and plan to become a full time faculty to complete this work next year. I have seen first hand the level of training and professionalism required to handle such an incredible role and vehemently oppose this bill. The proposed is not only going to harm school systems but will absolutely harm children as well.

I am happy to speak further on this topic,
Dr. Ahou Vaziri Line

Courtney Tullia
Self-school counselor
Conroe, TX

Chaplains, while they provide great services to the community, should not be employed by school districts to perform the duties of a school counselor. All school counselors must be certified to perform the duties at school, which chaplains do not hold the required certifications to work in this capacity.

Barbara Hua
Public schools
Conroe, TX

No, no, no!

Erica Woodall, LCSW
Self- School based mental health professional
Lewisville, TX

As a school base mental health professional this bill is deeply disturbing. HB 3614 would allow schools to replace certified school counselors with uncertified chaplains.

Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program.

There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill.

Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

Please oppose HB 3614 when it is heard by the Public Education Committee on Thursday.

This bill will harm our school systems and ultimately our children.

Pam Lynn, Retiree

Self

Humble, TX

I object to this bill on the grounds of religious freedoms. After violating separation of religion and state, add a "chaplain", [that does not have a psychology degree], would be providing advise or influence to children that, for many, may be of a denomination NOT of the parent's choosing or religious belief. Not acceptable!

Rhonda Evans

self

GODLEY, TX

Absolutely NOT! I am opposed to HB 3614. Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program.

There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill. Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling. As someone who served as a licensed School Social Worker for 10 years, I was not even eligible to serve as a counselor when I moved here to Texas even though I had the same educational requirements. NO WAY to HB3614!

Amanda Brown

SELF

Copperas Cove, TX

Hello, I am a certified school counselor working with K-5 students at a Texas elementary school. I vehemently disagree that chaplains should be allowed to perform the duties of a school counselor. In Texas, a school counselor is required to attain a teaching certification and then complete a masters program in school counseling. A chaplain neither has the experience nor the educational background that would permit them to work with children PreK-12th grade. A school counselor takes on a lot of responsibilities supporting a child's social, emotional, behavioral, and academic learning. Many of the roles and tasks assigned to a school counselor are within the classroom setting. Without experience as a teacher or working in the education system, a chaplain would fall short. A parent should feel confident that the professional in the school counselor role at their campus has the necessary educational backing and experience to support them and their child in times of need. A chaplain would be most appropriate to turn to in times of religious crisis, but not in an educational setting where behavior, social, emotional, and academic support are most needed. Even former military members interested in the role of teaching must complete alternative certification teaching programs under supervision and perform adequately in the classroom environment before they can continue to serve students in the classroom. Again, a chaplain does not have the K-12 educational experience necessary to support students at our schools. There are many schools where they would be the only mental health support for students due to high case loads for school counselors (1-700 in some cases). Without the experience necessary to handle that burden, they would fall short. It would be a mistake and put undue stress on our students, parents, and even the chaplains themselves who are underprepared to work in the school setting.

Michael Flynn

Self (plumber/teacher)

Porter, TX

I do not believe we should allow means to employ counselors of lesser training.

Regina Jones

self

Livingston, TX

NO! We need educationally trained and certified counselors performing the duties for our school children!!!

Lori Coutre
Self
Mineola, TX

House Bill 3614, which would permit chaplains to take over the role of professional school counselors, should be opposed as it undermines the safety and well-being of students. Professional school counselors are trained and licensed professionals who provide critical mental health and academic support services to students. Replacing them with chaplains, who lack the same level of qualifications and expertise, could put students' mental and emotional health at risk. Furthermore, chaplains' religious beliefs and practices may not align with those of all students, potentially creating an uncomfortable or exclusionary environment. All students deserve access to qualified and impartial professionals who can provide comprehensive and evidence-based support. House Bill 3614 jeopardizes this crucial aspect of education and should be rejected.

Candice Brattain
Self
Dallas, TX

As a Licensed Professional Counselor working within a school district, I am vehemently opposed to this bill. Chaplains do not receive the extensive education and training that it takes to provide mental health support to students and the lack thereof will do harm. It is necessary for counselors to be neutral and empathic to the experiences of ALL students regardless of religious affiliation, their belonging to LGBTQ+ groups, etc. This bill violates separation of church and state in a way that is very frightening. Should this role transition away from trained and educated professionals to religious clergy, I fear we will see an uptick in student suicidal and homicidal ideation and self harm (and we live in a state already struggling with mass school shootings). Cole Hefner is out of touch with his constituents and this bill should not exist.

Jodi Williams
Self
Houston, TX

I support this bill

Rohanna Sykes
Self
Spring, TX

Greetings,

As a Certified School Counselor, Licensed Professional Counselor and former appointed School Counselor Representative on the State Board for Educator Certification, I would like to express opposition to HB 3614. Professional School Counselors receive specific training during their Master's program and internship to meet the needs of all student including supporting their academic, social and emotional success. Their training helps them to best prepare students for post secondary success. Students are expressing increased needs for mental health supports which school counselors are trained to address. Chaplains do not have the knowledge, education or credentials to provide the services outlined in the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling which is in statute. Additionally, as the former School Counselor Representative on SBEC, it was important to ensure Professional School Counselors had classroom teaching experience and a Master's Degree in Counseling to ensure they had the knowledge and experience necessary to serve all students.

I am opposed to HB3614 and implore you to oppose it as well.

Sincerely,
Rohanna Sykes, CSC, LPC-S

Kim Mahoney
self
Corrigan, TX

I object to this bill because it violates the separation of church and state. As a parent, if I want my child to talk to their priest, I will take my child to church.

Chelsea Taylor
Self - Professional School Counselor
Houston, TX

HB 3614 would allow schools to replace certified school counselors with uncertified chaplains.

Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program.

There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill.

Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

Please oppose HB 3614 when it is heard by the Public Education Committee on Thursday.

Cesar Garza, Licensed Professional Counselor
The McCullough Center
San Antonio, TX

Chaplains are not trained to address the complex mental health needs of any population to the degree that licensed professional mental health workers are trained and educated to do. If any consideration should be made regarding initiating clearance to provide mental health support to all school aged children and teens it should be through a Fully Licensed Professional Mental Health Therapist (LPC, LMFT, LCSW-Clinical, Licensed Psychologist). It should be noted that Chaplains are not considered Licensed Professional Mental Health workers, as a result this bill should be halted as soon as it is presented.

Misty Strong
Self - Special Education Instructional Coordinator
Livingston, TX

Chaplains should not be the ones performing the duties of school counselors. We need to stay in our lanes and leave our highly trained and qualified people in their correct positions doing the jobs they were trained to do.

Lisa Grubbs, Dr.
self; former teacher, school counselor, and current counselor educator
Lewisville, TX

As a former school counselor and current school counselor educator I oppose HB 3614. In addition to being a significant infringement on the separation of church and state, the bill does not require any specific qualifications or training for chaplains. School counselors, educators and other professionals who provide direct services to students have to meet rigorous certification standards that ensure they are prepared to address a wide range of student needs. Parents are not required to give consent for their students to meet with a chaplain. Parents are required to give consent to meet with mental health professionals and to participate in most campus-based events.

Jennifer Womack

Professional Counseling graduate student

Round Rock, TX

Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program, and yet there are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill. Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling. Why would we allow someone with NO BACKGROUND CHECK into these schools with our kids? These children have been through enough trauma, they deserve someone who can adequately support them through it. If we want to raise happy children who will one day become productive members of society in this country, we need to support them the best way that we can. They deserve support from someone licensed, someone with a clean background, and someone who cares. Keep the school counselors in! Please, please do not pass this bill. Do it for the kids. Do it for the future of this country.

Matthew Lemberger-Truelove, Dr.

self

Corinth, TX

School counselors are highly trained educators and mental health professionals. The school counseling literature provides evidence that direct services generally improve student outcomes and school climate (Whiston & Quinby, 2009). Carrell and Hoekstra (2014) found that one additional school counselor reduces delinquent behaviors in all students and contributes to increases in male students' reading and math. They further found that school counselors have similar influences on achievement as compared to increasing the teacher quality for each educator in a school and is more than twice as influential on whole school outcomes such as employing a new teacher. Longitudinal and large-scale data drawn show that school counselors have desirable effects on areas such as student achievement, attendance, and discipline, particularly for culturally diverse, low-income, or academically challenged students (Domina et al., 2022; Mulhern, 2022). While chaplains provide important support to a variety of people, they are not trained to support students or educators in schools. There is no evidence that success in one capacity will translate into another area, especially given the myriad psychological and social issues that occur in schools. Admittedly, there are a dearth of mental health service providers compared to the outstanding need (particularly in many of the rural areas of Texas), there are other more compelling approaches to close the resource gaps. For example, nearly 50 years ago, federal and state governments invested in vocational guidance programs, which resulted in a deluge of new school counselors trainees. In the state of Texas, there are multiple school counseling graduate programs, including some nationally ranked programs. Rather than creating policy to employ untrained service providers, it stands to reason that the state can invest in our current state-supported training programs to increase the quantity and quality of school counselors. The proposed legislation places our most vulnerable students at great risk.

Wendy Tucker

self

Porter, TX

Absolutely not, There are so many mental issues with todays students, this is a terrible idea. Definitely need qualified counselors to help our children. Unbelievable

Julie Magadance, Mrs.

self

SAN ANTONIO, TX

I am concerned about allowing schools to employ chaplains to perform the duties of a school counselor because there is not a mechanism in place for ensuring the training and certification of chaplains like there is for school counselors. Chaplains are by design of the job, in the role of providing guidance from a certain point of view and to use a life of faith as a basis for decision making and discernment. This will not be appropriate for all students in schools, because not all students will be living the same faith lives as the chaplain. As a certified school counselor, I would not appreciate someone who did not complete a Master's Degree in Counseling to be able to hold the same role as me in a school without the training I completed. Please VOTE no on HB 3614.

Mendy Fears

SELF

LIVINGSTON, TX

I SUPPORT THIS BILL

Shauna McClain

Self

Wake Village, TX

This is a direct shot at those who have pursued and obtained the schooling serve in these positions.

VALUE PEOPLE AND THEIR CREDITIALS.

What is the underlying thoughts behind this Bill? Is it to get God back in schools, if so this is not they way.

What about ethics?

What about confidentiality?

What standards will these "Chaplin's" be held to?

And lastly, it is important to uphold the practice of counseling and also the safety of our kiddos.

Jade Richardson, Ms.

Self, Classroom teacher and School Counseling student

Granbury, TX

I would like to voice my opposition to HB 3614 to allow school districts to employ chaplains as opposed to licensed school counselors. As a current middle school educator, I see the need each and every day for qualified mental health professionals to be available to students. This year in addition to our two school counselors on campus our district has hired a licensed professional counselor who comes in to do sessions with individual students once a week. I have seen first hand the benefit that this has had on my students and the improvements they have made as a result. Additionally, I am currently working towards obtaining my Masters in Professional Counseling with a specification in School Counseling. This has been my goal since graduating high school and my desire to go into this field has only grown since I began teaching.

Currently, in order to become a certified school counselor in the state of Texas, a candidate must have over two years of teaching experience, which requires a bachelor's degree as well as completion of a licensed Educator Preparation Program. Then the candidate must complete a master's degree program with at least 48 hours of course work. From my own personal experience in one of these programs, they are very competitive and intensive. The program I am in through Lamar University will take me over two years to complete and requires an in-person residency course that I must travel for during the summer. In addition, to complete the program I will need to complete both a practicum course with 100 hours of observation and practice with a current school counselor as well as an internship course which requires 300 hours of service and the passing of two formal observations by a university field supervisor. All of this is required to be completed while I am still actively working as a classroom teacher and balancing the many responsibilities of that incredibly important role.

While I do not wish to imply that the chaplains that would be permitted to replace a certified school counselor would not have worked hard to get to where they are, I cannot in good conscience agree that they would effectively fill that role. Many people turn to religion in times of crisis and have found it to be very helpful for them. However, seeing as according to this bill they are not required to have any experience in mental healthcare or public education, I do not believe that they could provide the services that so many Texas students need. I am not wholly opposed to students having access to a chaplain if needed, but to me this is not the responsibility of the public school system. Based on the above statements, I do not believe allowing chaplains to replace Certified School Counselors is in the best interest of Texas school children and is a slap in the face to certified professionals with master's degrees and hundreds of hours of counseling as well as several thousand hours in Texas schools who have dedicated their career to our students.

Melinda DeChick
Hays CISD
San Marcos, TX

The first clause in the Bill of Rights states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.”

There is a separation of Church and State, this is a blatant disregard. Currently per 2022 data, Texas is rated 41 out of the 51 states/provinces of the United States in mental health episodes in youth per access to resources. States with rankings 39-51 indicate that youth have higher prevalence of mental illness and lower rates of access to care. Clergy are not provided with appropriate crisis intervention care to meet the needs of these students. I agree there that is a mental health crisis in Texas, please put money into appropriately trained resources, including but no limited to school counselors, social workers, and mental health trained police officers on our campuses. I currently serve a school of 700 students as the only school counselor, we need more crisis intervention trained staff so we can help these students as well as be proactive about their mental health and wellness.

There is a change needed. More trained staff. Less standardized testing stress for our Texas students. Their voices are not being heard, but as an educator I am their voice and advocate.

Clergy are not trained in crisis intervention or mental health needs. Would you allow a veterinarian to perform brain surgery on your child?

Amanda Flowers, School Counselor
TCA
Huffman, TX

I think that chaplains should not be able to perform the duties of school counselors in public school settings as they have not had the same training as school counselors.

Jessica Leinen
self-school counselor
Buda, TX

Chaplains can NOT perform the same duties as school counselors. The amount of mental health concerns school counselors see every day is overwhelming. I perform suicidal and NSSI assessments weekly (sometimes daily). I was trained to assess kids and their mental health status; chaplains are not trained in the same capacity. I have been involved in my church community since I was a child. I LOVE my church leaders but they can NOT do what I do. They are not trained in mental health concerns in the same manner. It all comes down to mental health. For me it's not even about separation of church and state...it's about mental health. Mental health needs are so crucial now with COVID (social delays and mental health was ignored), social media, school shootings, etc....we can NOT ignore or lower our mental health standards.

I can pull any school counselor aside and ask them to perform a suicide assessment on the spot (no prior notice required)...can you do the same with any chaplain? What are the chaplain training requirements? How are you regulating a chaplain's qualifications?

Le'Ann Solmonson
Solmonson Counseling Associates
NACOGDOCHES, TX

I am writing to vehemently oppose this bill. It is an affront to school counselors who hold a master's degree and have been trained and certified to hold the position. A chaplain is in no way qualified to serve as a school counselor. This bill is evidence of a total lack of understanding of the training and qualifications the Texas Education Commission and the State Board of Educator Certification has established to ensure students are appropriately served by a qualified school counseling profession. The bill is also in complete disregard for the separation of church and state. Please share your support for school counselors and the students they serve by voting no on this bill.

Jodi Williams

Self

Houston, TX

I do not support this bill

Sabrina Eads

self; LPC/psychotherapist

Houston, TX

HB 3614 would allow schools to replace certified school counselors with uncertified chaplains.

Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program.

There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill.

Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

Chaplains are NOT competent to serve in this role. Chaplains who have a religious background are inappropriate to serve in a state funded role, as well.

Please oppose HB 3614 when it is heard by the Public Education Committee on Thursday.

Nicole Brown

Elementary schools

Copperas Cove, TX

My father is a veteran of this great country and he fought for my right to to practice my great religion freely. Not only that I am an alumni of a prestigious religious university, we prayed before tests, sporting events, and concerts. With all that in mind you can see that I'm a proud Christian, but I strongly oppose this bill. While attending my great university we didn't have chaplains as counselors because they knew they were not equipped to advise someone during a mental health crisis. I attend church every Sunday for my spiritual health, I would not seek aide from my chaplain for my mental health. I also come from a family of educators, one of whom is a school counselor and she too doesn't support this bill.

I fear it could cause irreparable harm to those who need mental health services. As a Texan that is something I absolutely cannot support. We are a state that likes to put the needs of children first, and this bill is not that.

There is also a fear that this profession will take jobs away from those who are certified in this field.

Below are key points from the Texas school counseling association:

HB 3614 would allow schools to replace certified school counselors with uncertified chaplains.

Professional School Counselors must have a master's degree in counseling and complete a school counseling preparation program.

There are no credentials or background checks required for chaplains in the bill.

Chaplains do not have a background in classroom guidance, which is a core component of school counseling.

Thank you for your time and I hope you do what is right for the children and this state.

Hearing Date: April 20, 2023 8:00 AM

Danelle Schwertner

Self - Retail Business Owner

Miles, TX

I am Danelle Schwertner, and I am a parent of three public school students (2 current, 1 graduate), and I am also an elected school board member in my district (Miles ISD). I am vehemently against HB 3614, as school counselors are required to have a minimum of 48-hour master's degree in counseling, along with completing a rigorous school counselor prep program, and have at least two years of teaching experience as a classroom teacher. This is set by Texas Administrative Code 239.20, and there is no reason to change or bypass that. The amount of preparation to become a school counselor is required to help them take care of their duties and responsibilities with children who often need a lot of assistance. In today's climate where mental health is of paramount importance, good school counselors can help avoid some of the worst possible situations. Why would the legislature determine that a chaplain, who doesn't have to hold anything but a training certificate (in many circumstances), or possibly a bachelor's degree (if they are so motivated) and does not have to have any experience in schools besides having attended school at some point or another, be a good alternative to an actual school counselor? This is, quite frankly, ludicrous. It is a slap in the face to the people who are in the trenches with our schoolchildren every day, and who have worked for years to become counselors worthy of the title. I am not discounting that chaplains have use in society, but they are not at all qualified to be in schools and doing the job that our counselors do day in and day out. Please do not vote this bill out of committee. It is not a good idea, even in theory. Vote no on HB 3614.

Bena Glasscock

self, professional school counselor

Adrian, TX

I am writing against House Bill 3610 as it is currently written allowing school chaplains to "perform the duties of a school counselor." I am currently in my 30th year in public education. 24 of those years have been as a professional school counselor and counselor leader in four schools districts in the Metroplex and Panhandle. On a state level, I have served as counselor representative on a number of boards and task forces.

Professional school counselors are specially trained to work with school-aged children in the school setting. In order to become a certified school counselor in Texas, individuals must have experience as a classroom teacher, obtain a master's degree in counseling, complete an internship, and pass a certification exam. These highly trained and uniquely qualified individuals should not be replaced with individuals with no uniform standards for certification and no required training or expertise in working with students in an academic setting or with teaching the required curriculum in Chapter 33 of the Texas Education Code.

TEC 33.005 requires school counselors to "work with the school faculty and staff, students, parents, and the community to plan, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive school counseling program that conforms to the most recent edition of the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs..." This encompasses tiered services for students to be successful in school utilizing the four components of guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services and system support. In addition to mental health issues, school counselors provide support for academic success as well as college, career, and military readiness. They support teachers in working with a diverse group of students and support families in helping students grow to their fullest potential. Chaplains are not trained to, nor do they have the experience to, fulfill the requirements and job description set forth for professional school counselors.

The more appropriate place to add the provision for school chaplains would be in 21.003(b) in the list of other licensed professionals employed by schools. This would allow schools to hire chaplains in addition to other professionals to serve their unique purpose without supplanting master's level trained school counselors from their job of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program, while also ensuring that the school chaplains were certified by an appropriate state agency.

Brittany Thomas

Self- teacher

Lewisville, TX

This is absolutely absurd. You want to replace counselors with religious people? There is suppose to be a separation of church and state and this is not it. We are a country that is a freedom of religion and from religion. You are not respecting the 1st amendment rights of a large portion of public school students and all deserve the right to an counselor.

Patricia Moore

"self" Retired Teacher Alief ISD/ currently Alief ISD substitute teacher

Houston, TX

I urge you to VOTE YES on HB3614 Relating to allowing school districts to employ chaplains to perform the duties of school counselors. There comes a point when society must realize to keep using the same strategies over and over which on the most part are failing it is time to look else were for solutions.

Kelley Rumps

self/retired

The Woodlands, TX

I support this bill.

Wes Beard

Innovative Teachers of Texas

Deer Park, TX

I am a strong proponent of the need for chaplains in Texas public schools.