

## **Chair and Members of the Committee,**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Sydney Piras, and I am a school counselor at Stillwater Area High School. I am also the chair elect for the Minnesota School Counselor Association I am here because I care deeply about the safety and well-being of our students—and I am concerned that this legislation moves us in the wrong direction.

I understand the intent behind combining Student Support Personnel Aid into Safe Schools Aid. Flexibility and local control are important, but without dedicated funding for student support personnel, our schools risk losing the very professionals who prevent crises before they happen. True safety isn't just about responding to threats—it's about building strong relationships, identifying concerns early, and ensuring every student has access to mental health and wellness support.

When funding is lumped together, priorities shift. Schools already face tough financial decisions, and without a requirement to invest in student support personnel, those positions may be reduced or lost altogether. We cannot afford to let that happen. School counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses are the backbone of prevention, intervention, and student success. The research is clear: Schools with robust student support services have lower discipline rates, higher attendance, and improved academic outcomes. We are often that one trusted person in the school and for more lucky students, we get the opportunity to be of many trusted adults in the building.

If we truly want safe schools, we must invest in the people who provide direct support to students every day. I urge you to maintain and increase dedicated funding for student support personnel to ensure all students have access to the help they need. Thank you.

Sydney Piras