

Morgan Lueck  
China  
LD 927

Honorable members of the committee, I write to you today to express my strong opposition to Legislative Document 927, 'An Act To Require Chaplains in School Administrative Units.'

My concerns stem from several critical areas:

\* Separation of Church and State:

\* This bill raises serious constitutional questions regarding the separation of church and state. Public schools serve a diverse student body with varying religious and non-religious beliefs. Mandating chaplains within these institutions risks infringing upon the First Amendment rights of students and families.

\* The bill's provision regarding chaplains being certified by faith organizations raises the possibility of endorsing specific religious viewpoints within a public setting.

\* Lack of Educational Qualifications:

\* While the bill mandates background checks, it does not require chaplains to possess educational qualifications or training in counseling, child development, or educational best practices. This raises concerns about their ability to effectively support students' emotional and mental health needs.

\* Professional school counselors have extensive training in those areas, and are already present in schools. This bill creates a redundancy, that could also cause confusion for students.

\* Potential for Discrimination:

\* There are concerns that the presence of chaplains may create an environment where students from minority religious backgrounds or those with no religious affiliation feel marginalized or excluded.

\* This bill opens the door to potential discrimination against those who do not adhere to the same religious beliefs as the chaplain.

\* Impact on School Resources:

\* Requiring school administrative units to employ or accept chaplains places an additional financial burden on already strained school budgets. These resources could be better allocated to hiring qualified counselors, social workers, or other educational professionals.

\* Those funds would be better used for more needed positions within the school system.

In conclusion, I urge the committee to reject LD 927. This bill poses a threat to the principles of religious freedom, risks undermining the professional support systems already in place within our schools, and could negatively impact the well-being of our students.