

OFFERED BY COUNCILORS RUTHZEE LOUIJEUNE, GABRIELA COLETTA,
TANIA FERNANDES ANDERSON, ARROYO, BAKER, BOK, BREADON,
FLAHERTY, MURPHY AND FLYNN



CITY OF BOSTON IN CITY COUNCIL

ORDER FOR A HEARING TO ADDRESS THE MENTAL
HEALTH NEEDS OF OUR STUDENTS WITH A FOCUS ON
GUIDANCE COUNSELORS.

- WHEREAS,** School counselors meet the developmental needs of students through school counseling programs that address their academic, career, personal and social development, and there is a critical connection between ensuring our student's mental and behavioral health with their academic success; *and*
- WHEREAS,** According to the American School Counselor Association, every school should have at minimum 1 guidance counselor for every 250 students, and Massachusetts would need over a thousand more school counselors to meet the recommended ratio of one counselor to every 250 students; *and*
- WHEREAS,** The current FY24 BPS Superintendent's Budget Memo states "We have continued to make investments in our schools over the past few years, such as restorative justice practices, bilingual social workers, family liaisons, safety protocols, bullying prevention, *embedded counselors*, and peer mediation, to ensure that all our students receive the support they need"; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Last years' BPS FY23 Budget called for \$3.2 million dollars for increasing student supports by expanding access to 9th grade guidance counselors, lowering the ratio to 1:150 students; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Supporting school counselors and wraparound services is critical to ensuring the BPS community's holistic safety; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Massachusetts School Counselors Association school counselor of the year recipient, Tama Lang, succinctly put it, "The number one thing that would help us most is having more counselors. I am the sole counselor to 350 students. Increased funding for hiring more counselors statewide would certainly help address the increasing social and emotional needs of all of our students." She also noted that "[i]f an educator's social emotional well-being is compromised, the effects trickle down into the classroom, and it ultimately affects students,"; *and*
- WHEREAS,** There has been a marked increase in students struggling with mental health issues during and after the pandemic, including anxiety, depression, and deficits in self-regulation skills. Hiring more counselors would allow counselors to be more proactive in addressing the trauma and mental health needs of our students. It

would also give counselors further support needed to ensure students thrive, instead of having to react to emergency situations day in and day out; *and*

WHEREAS, We cannot recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic without social-emotional learning interventions that include our guidance counselors, school psychologists, social workers, and teachers; *and*

WHEREAS, Harvard professor Savitz-Romer’s report on guidance counseling revealed a piecemeal system with “no set of standards [or] guidelines across schools,” no unifying approach to data collection, and no clear-cut rules on how schools should use outside partners to advise students; *and*

WHEREAS, The same report outlined how there is little uniformity across districts as to how many students counselors are responsible for; what functions counselors perform; what their formal job titles are; and how much time they spend with students; *and*

WHEREAS, Guidance counseling in schools once focused largely on helping students prepare for college and careers, counselors have seen their responsibilities, case-loads, and scope of employment expand to encompass a host of new responsibilities; *and*

WHEREAS, School counselors get pulled into auxiliary roles including discipline, time management, emotional capacity building, or other needs, and we’re seeing counselors leaving BPS because their own mental health is being compromised; *and*

WHEREAS, Lower average caseloads can mean counselors have more time to spend with each student, fulfilling an especially important role as students struggle mentally and academically in the wake of the pandemic; *and*

WHEREAS, BPS hiring deficits have highlighted the increased need for investment in local workforce development pipelines into BPS social emotional and career counselors; *and*

WHEREAS, BPS must engage in difficult conversations around creating budget priorities for counselors and support staff hired during the pandemic as ESSER and CARES Act relief funds are set to expire in the coming years; ***NOW, THEREFORE BE IT***

ORDERED: That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council hold a hearing to review Boston Public School's commitment to school counselors, whereby the Boston Public School department, The Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development, Boston Public Health Commission and other interested parties be invited to testify.

Filed on: February 3, 2023