

The Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Act

On Sept. 12, 2018, Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR.) and Representative Katherine Clark (D-MA) introduced the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Act to provide funding to states to improve the staffing ratios for school counselors, psychologists and school social workers. This new version of the bill is an improvement on the last one. ACA supports the legislation and encourages you to go to the Take Action page and contact your Members of Congress. The bill numbers are S.3427 and H.R. 6775.

“Mental health care is essential health care, full stop. But right now in our schools, we’re treating it like an optional afterthought,” said Senator Merkley. “That’s unacceptable, and it puts our students’ lives at risk. This National Suicide Prevention Week, let’s commit to ensuring that every child in America has access to the mental health care they need.”

“We know that for kids to succeed, schools can’t just be about test scores,” said Congresswoman Clark. “We must invest directly in school nurses, social workers, and counselors who are central to fostering safe schools and promoting the long-term health and welfare of young adults.”

The recommended student-to-counselor ratio is 250 students per counselor, but currently the national average is 482 students per counselor and this average continues to rise. For school psychologists the recommended ratio is 500 to 700 students per provider and 250 to 1 for school social workers.

The Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Act would:

- Establish two five-year renewable grant programs to staff elementary and secondary schools with school counselors, psychologists and social workers, effectively by providing federal grants to states to disburse to school districts.
- Base allotment grants: State educational agencies would receive a grant on a proportional basis based on the number of elementary and secondary school students in each state. No state would receive less than \$1 million for this grant.
- Need-based grants: State educational agencies may apply, on a competitive basis, for additional funds through a need-based grant. States must provide matching funds in an amount equal to not less than one half of the additional grant amount. These grants are based on need for mental health services providers to achieve the recommended student-to-staff ratios for school counselors, psychologists and social workers.

The new formula would provide funding for all 50 states, and because matching funds are required, states receiving the grants would show a commitment to improving student mental health and wellness. The bill requests an initial authorization level of \$5 billion.

You can learn more about the bill [here](#).