

# Texas Chaplains in Public Schools Law

## *A Toolkit for Advocates to Urge School Districts to Vote to Protect Religious Freedom by Not Adopting a School Chaplain Policy*

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### **“Who We Are”**

This toolkit was created by a coalition of organizations<sup>1</sup> to assist parents, students, teachers, faith leaders, advocates, and concerned community members to understand and oppose a new Texas law that allows unqualified chaplains in public and charter schools in place of school counselors, potentially harming students and improperly inserting religion into public schools. The law requires all public school districts to vote between September 1st, 2023, and March 1st, 2024, on whether they will allow unregulated chaplains to provide services to students—or even replace school counselors.

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<sup>1</sup> American Atheists, ACLU of Texas, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, Freedom From Religion Foundation, Interfaith Alliance, SOJOURN (Southern Jewish Resource Network for Gender & Sexual Diversity), Texas Impact.

Inside this toolkit, you will find an overview of how this new law is being implemented, what you can do to fight its implementation, and resources to help you as you advocate for your children, your schools, and the education and civil rights of all students.

### **The New Chaplain Law: SB 763**

On June 18th, 2023, Governor Greg Abbott signed a bill into law ([SB 763](#)) that allows public school districts to hire or accept as volunteers school chaplains to provide “support, services, and programs for students.” The law provides for chaplain salaries to be drawn from funds designated “to improve school safety and security.” Those funds are directed at – but not limited to – the roles of restorative discipline and justice practices, mental and behavioral health support, and suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention - meaning that hiring chaplains would reduce valuable budget funds for these critical services.

Under this new law, chaplains could serve as students’ first point of contact for mental health support, suicide prevention, and other behavioral health services—even though they are not required to have any type of training or certification. There is no requirement in the law that the chaplains comply with constitutional prohibitions against proselytizing while at schools or serve students from different religious backgrounds. Nor are there appropriate screening and safety standards to protect children and prevent child abuse.

Supporters of this law claim that chaplains will help alleviate the growing need for mental health support in public schools and the shortage of school counselors. Chaplains, however, are not a proper replacement for trained school counselors. School counselors in Texas are required to have a master’s degree and two years’ worth of teaching experience, pass a certification exam, and complete the state’s school counselor preparation program before they are allowed to provide any services to students. On the other hand, the chaplains allowed by this law need not meet any training or certification requirements, including ordination by an established denomination. The only requirement is that candidates not be registered sex offenders.

#### *Background and Intent*

Rocky J Malloy reposted  
**Julie Pickren** @Julie4TX · Jul 26  
Texas is leading! 4 other states have filed The Texas School Chaplain Bill in their states. SBOE #7 gave me a clear mandate you wanted prayer and God back in schools. Now we are leading the nation. 🇺🇸 🙏



[https://twitter.com/cjtackett/status/1655911217519525889?s=46&t=T4Nu\\_WWvhWLNGUHG4U0Buw](https://twitter.com/cjtackett/status/1655911217519525889?s=46&t=T4Nu_WWvhWLNGUHG4U0Buw)

Amendment 2 (Wu) would have prevented public funds from being used to compensate a chaplain.

Amendment 3 (Talarico) would have protected students rights, ensuring parents provide consent to deal with the chaplain AND requiring no proselytizing, respecting diversity. These amendments were rejected. Republicans said no.

Amendment 4 (Wu) would have required school districts or open enrollment charter schools that employ or accept a volunteer chaplain to provide a representative of any

other denomination or faith if requested by a student, a student's parent or guardian or a teacher.

On March 23rd, Patriot Mobile hosted an event. David Barton of WallBuilders was a speaker. He laid out the plan:

- take over local levers of power
- force religion into those public entities (city, county, public school)
- get sued and rely on an infected court system

While some chaplains might have some training in mental-behavioral health or school-age counseling, this law provides no safeguards to ensure chaplains employed under this program are qualified to provide the complex guidance and support young people need as they navigate the difficulties that come with growing up in today's world.

### **What are the Implications of the Chaplain Law?**

Not only can the chaplains allowed by this law lack even the most basic qualifications, but their very presence in schools is an inherent violation of the United States and Texas Constitutions, which protect our right to religious freedom by forbidding the government from funding religion, preferring religion over nonreligion, or favoring one religion over another.

Every part of this new law violates these principles. It allows school districts to use taxpayer money to hire religious leaders without prohibiting them from evangelizing students or imposing their interpretations of scripture or faith tenets through the services they provide. Even if districts choose only to accept chaplains on a volunteer basis, the government will still be giving them the ability to interact with students and promote their beliefs without any oversight. Indeed, chaplains could teach a religion that conflicts with that of students and parents. Freedom of religion means that parents—not school officials or state legislatures—have the right to direct their children's religious education and should be able to entrust that their children will not have a particular religious perspective forced on them while attending our public schools.

#### *The Difference between Chaplains and Counselors:*

- Chaplains, whether employed or appointed to volunteer, are not required to be certified by the State Board for Educator Certification, any religious denomination, or other government agency.

- School counselors in Texas are required to have a master’s degree and two years’ worth of teaching experience, pass a certification exam, and complete the state’s school counselor preparation program before they are allowed to provide any services to students.
  - Volunteer chaplains are not required to undergo the same exhaustive background checks as counselors and school staff.
    - School counselors in Texas are required to obtain a background and criminal history check administered by the Texas DPS.
  - Both the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the Texas Constitution protect our right to religious freedom. Hiring chaplains with taxpayer dollars would amount to state-sponsored religion.
    - Chaplains would not be required to have any oversight and may freely engage in religious activities with students.
  - School counselors are certified and licensed educators who improve student success for ALL students by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program. They help students apply academic achievement strategies, resolve emotional turmoil, apply interpersonal skills, and plan for college or the workforce.
    - We are facing a counselor shortage in Texas, and the school board should prioritize budget funds for hiring more counselors, not chaplains.
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## **How can the Community Take Action?**

Whether you are a parent, current or retired educator, or community member, you can advocate for all students and help prevent this. Between September 1, 2023, and March 1, 2024, every district is required to decide for themselves whether to adopt a policy to allow chaplains in public schools. The most effective organizing will need to be done locally: organize with other parents and students, and tell your district that you do not want unqualified chaplains evangelizing students using your hard-earned tax dollars.

### *Let’s talk about the landscape of Texas school districts.*

Beginning September 1st, we will see districts across Texas begin to discuss the issue at local school board meetings before they vote. Understanding the landscape of school districts is important to your community's success in preventing districts from adopting this harmful policy.

## **What is a School Board?**

Every district in Texas has a School Board that makes decisions on important education issues. This Board is composed of trustees, who are members of the community elected by the people. They serve their constituents by helping govern the schools in their district. The trustees who represent your community's school district will make the final decision on whether to allow chaplains in your schools or even to replace your school counselors with chaplains.

## **How Will Boards Consider the School Chaplain Law?**

Before the Board can make a final decision, it is required to hold a public meeting about the issue. Most school districts allow community members to participate in the meeting by setting aside time for people to voice their opinions, giving each person approximately 3 minutes to speak. The trustees will vote on whether to change their policies once they have received public input.

## **How Do I Find Out About Upcoming School Board Meetings?**

Your School Board could announce an upcoming public meeting in several different ways. Some districts will post an announcement on their websites in PDF form, whereas others have publicly accessible calendars you can monitor. Some school districts will even allow you to sign up for their email list so that you can be notified the minute a public meeting is put on the schedule. To see how your district announces meetings, check its website for information on meeting agendas, upcoming meetings, and events. If you are unsure of which school district makes decisions for your area, you can input your address into the Texas Education Agency's School District Locator here:

<https://tea-texas.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=51f0c8fa684c4d399d8d182e6edd5d97>.

## **How Do I Know If They Will Discuss the Issue at the Next Meeting?**

Once you know how your school district announces meetings, check the agenda of upcoming meetings to see if your Board will be discussing whether to bring in chaplains. Not all agendas will explicitly state that the Board intends to discuss this issue. \*Note: Pay special attention to any meeting where the Board will be discussing personnel for the upcoming school year or filling vacant positions within the district.\* Also, look for any agenda items to discuss bill number SB 763 or Section 23.001 of the Texas Education Code.

## **Getting Involved: *Ways You Can Take Action***

Organizing as a community creates opportunities for higher engagement and successful coordinated actions. Connecting with other parents in the community, your local Parent Teacher Association (PTA), local advocacy groups, or existing networks of parent advocates in your area through socials or in-person/virtual events can make this process easier and amplify your message.

Build a strong base of informed advocates with in-person and online events. Are there any upcoming events related to education policy, LGBTQ+, or local school board policies where you can share information about the chaplain bill? If these spaces don't seem to exist in your community, think about creating that space yourself.

## **Contact Board Members**

Contacting a school board member can be an effective way to take action remotely. Reaching out to members is a great way to show them that the community cares about this issue and propose that the board take appropriate action. You can email, call, and meet with local officials. Remember, you do not have to be an expert on an issue as long as you can effectively communicate how this issue indirectly or directly affects you and your community.

### *Different Ways to Contact Board Members*

- Email
- Call
- Send a letter

## **Speak at a Board Meeting**

If you see a meeting where hiring chaplains may be discussed, check if your district has any special policies regarding speaking before the Board. Some districts, for example, require speakers to sign up to speak by 3 p.m. on the day before the Board meeting. Speaking at board meetings is a way to voice your opposition against the chaplain policy in addition to registering your official stance on the board's public record. Your personal story and connection to the issue can make a lasting impact inside and outside the meeting room. Each person is typically limited to 2 - 3 minutes of testimony. Remember, you are the expert of your own story and are the expert on how a policy will impact you and your community.

## *Writing your script for any method of communication*

Follow the outline below for general guidance on writing a call script, email, or letter to a board member or preparing to speak at a school board meeting.

### **A. Introduce Yourself-**

- Who are you?
- Are you a parent\relative, current, or former student\educator?

### **B. State Your Stance on the Chaplain law-**

- Why are you testifying?

### **C. Why is this issue important to you and your community?-**

- In what ways does this issue or bill disproportionately affect you and your community?

*Tip: Focus on your personal story and experiences.*

*Tip: If you are a person of faith, it's important to mention that aspect of your motivation to ensure that school board members know that religious Texans don't support this effort.*

### **D. The Ask -**

- I ask that you put students first and vote against the adoption of the Chaplain law in our school district.

### **E. Close -**

- Thank them for their time.

*Tip: This outline can also work for letters and emails to board members!*



## Email, Call, Testimony: Script Example

Dear Rep. (Last name),

### **Introduce Yourself-**

*EXAMPLE:*

*My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am a [parent\relative, student, educator, person of faith, community member] in [school district, city].*

### **State Your Stance on the Chaplain Policy-**

*EXAMPLE:*

*I am contacting you today to urge board members to vote against the adoption of the chaplain policy during next week's vote.*

### **Why is this issue important to you and your community?-**

*EXAMPLE:*

*As a queer student who doesn't have access to an advisor who can guide me outside of my home, chaplains entering my school and acting as an advisor make me and my friends uncomfortable. I worry I will not be able to receive the same level of counseling from a chaplain.*

*EXAMPLE:*

*Jewish students are a religious minority in Texas - and the rejected amendments make it clear that this law is not intended to provide adequate support or care for religious minorities. Instead, it's making it so that the only mental health support in a school could come from someone whose goal is to convert rather than to provide help.*

### **The Ask:**

*EXAMPLE:*

*I ask that you protect students' religious freedom and vote against adopting the chaplain policy in our school district. Public schools should be places where students of all faiths and none are respected and are prepared to thrive in our diverse state, not where the government takes over religious instruction.*

### **Close -**

*EXAMPLE:*

*Thank you for taking the time to [read my letter/ answer my call]. I hope you will keep my words in mind when voting.*

Sincerely,  
(Full name)  
(Address)  
(Phone number)

See more examples [here](#).

## Write a Letter to the Editor or Op-ed

Writing and sending letters to your local newspaper is a powerful way to let elected officials know where the public stands on issues that affect the community. These letters could also be a good way to inform the rest of the community on what is happening.

Tips to remember: Know the word limit and keep it short and to the point. A letter to the editor is 150-200 words and responds to a specific article published by the outlet. Op-eds are usually 600-800 words and give a more in-depth opinion on a current event, not necessarily in response to a specific article. You can see word limits by the opinion page of your papers website or sometimes on their print on the opinion section.

Reference the article that you're responding to in your letter. If you are responding to an article recently published in the paper, include it in your letter. Something like, “*In response to Tuesday's article, the chaplain bill has broader implications...*”

Mention your elected officials by name in the letter or op-ed. Elected officials notice when their name is in the paper.

*Note: Letters to the editor and op-eds are more likely to get published when submitted by an individual rather than a group.*

### *Letter to the editor outline:*

- Cite the specific article you are responding to
- State your position
- Tell your story
- State a few statistics or facts about the issue, and conclude with your call to action.

*See a sample template [here](#).*

*See a published letter to the editor from activists in Texas [here](#).*

## Submitting Your Letter and Next Steps

- When you're ready, submit your letter. Go to your local newspaper's website and search for directions for submitting it online. If you can't, send it to wherever your newspaper receives physical mail.
- Call the paper the following day to make sure they received your letter. This call will help bump your letter up in the line. You can follow this script: “Hi, I am calling to make sure you received my letter to the editor and ask if you know when it will be published?...Great, thanks!”

- Check the paper each day after you submit your letter. That way, you'll know as soon as your letter has been published, and you can begin sharing it on social media and email listservs so it reaches an even wider audience.
- Post a picture of your letter to the editor on your social media. It furthers your reach for new community members to learn about your campaign.

**Took action? Report back [here](#).**

### *Op-ed outline:*

- Lede: Catch the reader's attention
- Thesis: State your position
- Body: Give three pieces of evidence that back up your thesis
  - Personal stories
  - Quotes from reputable sources
  - Statistics/studies
  - Scripture
  - Cite [Texas chaplains' opposition to the policy](#)
- Call to action: Ask readers to make sure school board members here from them
- Kicker: End with a final piece of evidence, vision for the future, or circle back to the thesis

*See published op-eds opposing the chaplain policy [here](#) and [here](#).*

Email or mail a copy to your campaign target. If your letter or op-ed is published, send a copy by email or print to your campaign target, such as an elected official, and make your next ask. If your letter or op-ed isn't published within a few days, make some tweaks and submit again. You can also try submitting it to another paper -- just make sure not to submit the same piece to the same paper in the same 1-2 day period. Take what you create and space it out over different publications and at least a week's time.

## **Collect Petition Signatures**

Why is collecting petition signatures an effective tactic?

- Create public support by having conversations with your community during your petition gathering about your campaign and your ask.
- Build a list of supporters for your issue that you can ask to take action in other ways later on.

- Show public support and put pressure on elected officials by creating a group of support you make your campaign nautical for your target.
- Get press attention by making an event out of your petition delivery. Press coverage will help your campaign reach more people and put more public pressure on your target.

## How to Create a Petition

Include all the important key points in your petition such as who you are petitioning, ample space for name and contact information to get back in touch with the signer, and jurisdiction that your signer lives in to show they are a constituent of your targeted district.

[Check out this sample petition that you can copy to create your own!](#)

### Prepare all of the materials you will need:

- Multiple blank petition sheets, pens, clipboards, and any information about your issue that you want to hand out (keep it simple).
- Choose a location where you will collect petitions - at your local public libraries, grocery stores, community college campuses, or other high-traffic public areas in your school district.
  - You can also collect petitions by going to public events like county fairs or going door-to-door canvassing.

## Volunteers

Recruiting volunteers in your efforts can help increase your efforts and create a stronger community of advocates. Share your event on socials with your network, and recruit family, friends, and neighbors to join you.

## Collecting Signatures

Some people in your group may have experience petitioning, while others may not. Provide a group training in order to ensure folks understand the implications of the chaplain law and how to connect with others.

### *A good training has the following components:*

1. Give context - Why are you collecting petition signatures today? Why is this campaign important? How does collecting petition signatures help you win?
2. Give tips on how to be successful at collecting petitions -
  - Be friendly and greet everyone with a big wave. A big wave and smile will increase the number of people who stop to sign your

petition! Make a strong, direct ask – for example, “Hi, Hi, can you sign a petition to oppose chaplains in our public schools?”

- Note: If you’re going door-to-door, be sure to stay within eye sight of one another and follow best safety practices for canvassing. Keep folks in pairs so that they stay motivated and have a better experience.
- Make sure to get complete contact information -- Half the goal of collecting signatures is to build a list of community members who are with us and that we can contact later on to get involved. Be direct in asking for the person’s phone and email if they don’t initially write it down.
  - *“Can you put your contact info down so we can keep you updated on important developments with our efforts?”*
- Review any materials that may be useful for volunteers.
- Practice - Have volunteers practice the script you’re using, if any,, or just practice stopping people, asking them to sign petitions, and carrying a conversation about the topic.

Check-in with the group throughout, ask them how it’s going, remind them how important the work they are doing is, and express your appreciation. Collecting petitions can be challenging; however, it can expand your efforts.

Take pictures to share on Twitter to spread the word of your campaign, post them in your Facebook group later as a way to publicly thank your volunteers, and tag local organizations like Texas Freedom Network, Texas Impact, Interfaith Alliance, and Baptist Joint Committee, so we can show off all the good work activists are doing, too!

### **After Your Event**

Collect your materials and debrief with your volunteers. Make sure to get all the signed petition sheets back. Ask your volunteers how their experience was. Remind everyone how important their work today was, and thank everyone.

Put your petitions in the right place.

- If you are collecting information to add people to an email list or Facebook group, enter your “data” into a spreadsheet or however you are tracking their information.

When you’re ready to drop off of your petitions, organize a petition drop-off.

## Organize Protests and Rallies

### Why are protests and rallies effective tactics?

- Applies public pressure - elected officials or any other of your targets can see what the support looks like for your campaign.
- Generates publicity - press can visually see what the support of your campaign looks like, which makes it fascinating action to cover
- Great first action for new activists to participate in - rallies can often be fun and an easy way for someone not totally plugged into your campaign to get involved with.

Note: What is the difference between a rally and a protest? A rally sometimes has a speaking program, and a protest is just a gathering. Both can be good!

### Planning the Protest or Rally

Pick a time, date, and location. Lunchtime on weekdays tends to be better for attracting reporters, while weekends tend to be better for attracting more attendees. Pick a location that's symbolically significant – your school districts administrative building, for example. The best protests are short and high-energy, so don't plan for your event to run for longer than an hour and keep the number of speakers between 2 and 4.

Recruit attendees- Post your event on friendly parent groups, share it on social media like Facebook and Twitter, invite your friends and family with calls, texts, emails, and in-person, post flyers in public places, etc. More people will always make your protest better, so identify other stakeholders (communities, groups, orgs, etc) who share your cause, and strategize how the planning team will reach out to them.

Make signs- Remember that any sign you make could end up on the paper's front page representing the purpose of your protest, so make sure the message is simple and clear. Making signs is a great activity for a group meeting before your protest. Print out chant and/or song sheets to keep the crowd energized.

Invite the press - including local, state, and national affiliates of media outlets and newspapers. Tell them the exact protest time and the reason for the protest. Appoint a press lead for your group to coordinate communication with the press and act as a spokesperson for the group.

Delegate responsibilities for the day of the event. Depending how big you expect your event to be, it's best to have a volunteer or volunteer team on these responsibilities:

- Lead chants and keep energy high
- Prepared to talk to press
- Take photos and video
- Greet and collect contact information from attendees
- Be the point person for dealing with any disruptive participants or questions from law enforcement
- Speakers ready to share their personal stories (if this is part of your event)

### **During the Protest or Rally**

Be visible and be loud! Well-organized protests will take advantage of key high-visibility areas to show off signs and let locals know what you are advocating for.

Take photos and videos. Designate several people in your group to take photos and video that you can post on social media during and after the event, as well as distribute to the press later.

Be safe, but also be aware of your First Amendment right to be there and do what you are doing. Police will typically be most concerned with keeping you out of the street and keeping sidewalks clear for pedestrians. Comply with lawful orders they give you, but insist on your right to protest.

Find reporters and tell them why you're there—getting local press coverage and making it clear that local community members support you.

### **After the Protest or Rally**

Follow up with local reporters. Email them photos and videos from the protest and any other important information, including the number of people who attended and spoke out in support of your cause.

- Share your photos on social media to show more people what your campaign is working on.
- Plan your next tactic and event. Continue your good work and plan your next steps/action.

- Follow up with activists who attended with next steps. Thank them for coming, and remind them of what you're doing next to help achieve your goal.

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## **Getting Involved:** *How to Talk About the Chaplain Policy*

Members of the community of different backgrounds oppose the adoption of a Chaplain policy in Texas schools. We must talk about the issue in a manner that brings us together rather than alienating us. Strong messaging across our community ensures our efforts are amplified and heard by the board.

### **How to Talk About the Chaplain Policy: *Talking Points***

*Tip: Focus on talking points you most identify with.*

- **School counselors play an important role in students' lives that chaplains are not able to fulfill.**
  - School counselors are certified and licensed educators who improve student success for ALL students by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program. They help students apply academic achievement strategies, provide counseling, apply interpersonal skills, and plan for college or the workforce.
  - Chaplains, in contrast, are religious leaders who are trained to provide religious services and spiritual care.
  - We are facing a counselor shortage in Texas, and the school board should prioritize budget funds for hiring more school counselors, not unqualified chaplains.
    - [A Houston Chronicle study](#) done last year found that all but four of the 1,200 public school and open-enrollment charter districts in Texas failed to meet the Texas Education Agency's recommendation of one school counselor per 250 students.
- **Replacing well-educated and licensed professionals with uncertified chaplains threatens the safety and education of our students.**
  - Chaplains, unlike counselors, are not given the professional training required to care for the mental health of all students. They are not required to have an advanced degree, be certified by the State Board for Educator Certification, be affiliated with a denomination, or be endorsed or licensed by any major or reputable entity.



- Without the credentials, experience, and training required of school counselors, religious chaplains will not be equipped to support students dealing with serious matters like anxiety, depression, eating disorders, self-harm, or suicidal ideation.
- **Allowing chaplains in public schools would violate the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the Texas Constitution.**
  - Both the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the Texas Constitution protect our right to religious freedom. Hiring chaplains with taxpayer dollars would amount to government interference with religion. And it would inevitably lead to chaplains engaging in religious proselytization and coercing students to participate in religious activities or prayer. No student in a public school should feel pressured by government officials to participate in religious activities or indoctrinated into a particular religion.
    - For example, under the supervision of a chaplain, students may feel pressure to submit to the chaplain’s religious evangelism or join them in prayer.
    - Nothing in the law prohibits the chaplains from proselytizing or evangelizing.
    - Nothing in the law requires chaplains to provide services to those with whom they may disagree, such as students of different religious or LGBTQIA+ students.
  - Allowing chaplains will lead to religious favoritism. There is no way for the school board to hire a chaplain of every religious faith. If the school board picks and chooses who to hire, it will be favoring some religions over others. This violates the First Amendment.
  - Enjoying the freedom to decide whether to be religious is a core part of what makes us Texan and American.
  - Texans of all religious backgrounds, and those who are not religious, know that schools and government officials should not be dictating what our children believe or how they worship.
- **Freedom of religion means that parents — not public school employees — have the right to direct their children’s religious education and development.**
  - Families and students in Texas practice a wide variety of faiths, and many are nonreligious. All should feel welcome in public schools.

- This bill is a “Trojan horse to allow unqualified religious fanatics to enter our school and indoctrinate our kids.” - [Rep. James Talarico](#)
  - As a parent, I would be outraged if this school board voted to employ (or accept as volunteers) religious chaplains. By doing so, the board would be allowing a government intrusion into our private lives and sending a message that they think they know how to raise my children better than I do.
  - This law does not even require parental consent before a chaplain would provide “services” to my child—that is a violation of my right as a parent to raise my child as I see fit.
  - This law is part of a coordinated campaign by conservative Christian-based organizations and their legislative allies to force state-sponsored religion into public schools without parental consent.
- **Hiring Chaplains Would Undermine Our Public Schools.**
    - The same Texas politicians trying to control what students think — by banning books and censoring curricula — now want to dictate what students believe or how they worship. This school board has the opportunity to stop this pattern and defend the integrity of public schools by voting “no” on chaplains.
    - The school board should reject the use of chaplains and the risk of religious discrimination and bullying that comes with forcing state-sponsored religion into our public schools.
    - Public schools should be places where our students are respected and are prepared to thrive in our diverse state, not places where they are coerced or indoctrinated with religious ideology.
- **Concern for LGBTQIA+ and other vulnerable students.**
    - Employing unregulated and untrained chaplains in our schools would have an especially negative impact on vulnerable students, including those who face discrimination and rely on mental health support.
    - Nothing in this law requires chaplains to have expertise to provide unbiased, adequate support for all of our students. This type of mental health support is essential to our most vulnerable students—like LGBTQIA+ students, BIPOC students, and students of non-majority religious backgrounds.

- “[A] chaplain is not trained in how the brain works or what helps it work best. Someone with a religious background could push prayer or other strategies that increase shame. And if those don’t work, the child is going to feel like their relationship with God is broken, and that they’re a broken and damaged person as a result.”- Dr. Lindsay Bira, a psychologist and assistant professor of psychiatry at UT Health San Antonio.
- Further, unregulated chaplains may engage in directly harmful practices that endanger the mental health of students, such as discrimination and conversion therapy.
- As a parent, I am very worried that the district will hire chaplains that are incapable of providing unbiased, non-judgmental support to my LGBTQIA+ child.
- Given the history of religious institutions rejecting the LGBTQIA+ community, it is unlikely that LGBTQIA+ students will feel comfortable going to a chaplain for mental health support at school - or that an unlicensed chaplain would have the skills and know-how to help that student if they did. This further limits the mental health support available to LGBTQIA+ youth.

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## **FAQ:**

### **Q: My school district passed the chaplain law; what now?**

A: If your district votes to permit the use of religious chaplains, it is critical that you advocate for policies that would establish minimum standards, require oversight of chaplain practices, and ensure student safety. At a minimum, any program should require training in core competencies commensurate with non-religious professionals engaged in the same work, such as trauma-informed practices and training in laws related to maintaining the confidentiality of sensitive personal information.

Help us track and understand what is happening in our communities by letting us know if your school district plans to implement the Chaplain policy. Doing so will help our efforts and create a strong network of advocates.

[Report back to this form.](#)

## **Q: How can I advocate against the chaplain law in an area that feels like an uphill battle?**

A: School districts are not isolated from one another.; they are all part of the same school finance system. The decisions made in one school district affect other districts. An attack on one school district is an attack on all districts and all students. It's important to share your story and advocate against the Chaplain law in your local district, especially rural areas, which may feel like an uphill battle as they can influence surrounding districts.

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## **Resources and Materials**

Need help organizing or advice on what to do next? Here is a list of organizations and resources that may be able to provide support and their contact information:

- Texas State Teachers Association: Support Certified Counselors to Protect Our Kids ■ [SB 763 flyer.pdf](#)
- American School Counselor Association: The Role of a School Counselor <https://schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/ee8b2e1b-d021-4575-982c-c84402cb2cd2/Role-Statement.pdf>

## **Organizational Letters to School Boards:**

- Sign-On Letter for Chaplains Working in or Trained in Texas (please share!): <https://support.interfaithalliance.org/a/say-no-chaplains-texas-schools>
- ACLU/AU/FFRF Legal Letter: [Letter to Texas School Boards re: Unconstitutional proposals to allow chaplains in public schools | American Civil Liberties Union \(aclu.org\)](#)
- <https://interfaithalliance.org/no-chaplains-in-public-schools/>

## **Relevant Media Articles:**

- Civil Rights Groups Declare a ‘Code Red’ Over Texas’ School Chaplain Law, Dallas Observer, June 29, 2023, <https://www.dallasobserver.com/news/texas-school-chaplain-bill-deemed-unconstitutional-by-aclu-16904752>

- Key Supporter of Texas School Chaplain Bill Has Pushed for Evangelism in Schools, The Texas Tribune, May 19, 2023,  
<https://www.texastribune.org/2023/05/19/legislature-chaplain-bill-rocky-malloy/>
- Unlicensed Religious Chaplains May Counsel Students in Texas' Public Schools After Lawmakers OK Proposal, The Texas Tribune, May 24, 2023,  
<https://www.texastribune.org/2023/05/24/texas-legislature-chaplains-schools/>
- Meet the Activists Behind the Texas Bill to Put Chaplains in Schools, The Washington Post, May 26, 2023,  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2023/05/26/meet-activists-behind-texas-bill-put-chaplains-schools/>
- Students need qualified counselors, not chaplains. The jobs are too different, Fort-Worth Star-Telegram, September 1, 2023  
<https://www.star-telegram.com/opinion/opn-columns-blogs/other-voices/article278827989.html>
- More than 100 school chaplains oppose new law allowing them to serve as counselors, KERA, August 30, 2023  
<https://www.keranews.org/education/2023-08-23/texas-chaplains-oppose-new-school-law>
- New Texas law deprives families of religious liberty rights, CNN, September 11, 2023  
<https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/11/opinions/texas-chaplains-school-law-religious-liberty-tyler/index.html>