

*** MEMORANDUM ***

To: Legislative committee members considering AB 251, SB 253

From: Wisconsin School Psychologists Association (WSPA)
Wisconsin School Social Workers Association (WSSWA)

Re: **Opposition to AB 251, SB 253, relating to a Tier 1 DPI license for marriage and family therapists**

Date: November 1, 2023

When legislators consider the mental health needs of Wisconsin students and families, they should first consider the existing pupil service professionals authorized under Wisconsin law and whether there is enough staffing and support to address the needs that exist. With such a review, you will see a serious shortage of pupil service professionals, and growing and serious needs going unmet.

Rather than provide desperately-needed funding for pupil service professionals, AB 251 and SB 253 would mandate that DPI change its administrative rules to create a new Tier 1 license for marriage and family therapists. We do not believe this is the best strategy for addressing the needs of our schools. Therefore, we oppose the bills.

In the recent state budget debate, Governor Evers proposed putting \$36 million into hiring more pupil service professionals to address mental health needs. The Legislature rejected all of this funding, even though the state was experiencing a record state budget surplus. As the budget surplus continues to grow, the Legislature could reconsider its decision to not put more funding into paying for pupil service professionals.

Our organizations also have the following concerns:

- The bills would mandate a change in the administrative rules without making changes in the relevant statutes, which refer to "pupil service professionals" and then refer to counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses.
- A concern has been raised about the reference to HIPAA. It is our understanding that the relevant statute should be FERPA.
- An amendment has been drafted that would say that marriage and family therapists cannot practice as school social workers. Shouldn't it also be made clear that marriage and family therapists cannot practice as school psychologists and school counselors?
- Why just a Tier 1 license? For other pupil service professions, as someone progresses in their career, the assumption is that a Tier 1 license will lead to a Tier 2 license.

Thank you for considering the views of the state's school psychologists and school social workers.