

**SB1401 (Lightford)**

**Caseload of Social Workers, School Counselors, Nurses, School Psychologists & Speech Language Pathologists**

**SUPPORT**

**Background**

CASELOAD means the number of students assigned to an individual school psychologist, school social worker, school counselor, school nurse, speech-language pathologist, or other clinician providing special education or related services.

WORKLOAD refers to all activities required and performed by a clinician. Workload includes the time spent providing direct services to students as well as the time spent performing other required tasks such as consultation with other clinicians, educators, and families, travel between schools, and paperwork. In addition, the needs of each student receiving services varies significantly which impacts the workload of the clinician.

**Issue**

Unreasonably high caseloads contribute to Illinois’ clinician (e.g., school psychologist, school social worker, school counselor, school nurse) shortage and adversely impacts students and their families. Caseloads do not consider the time it takes to do the work required for each assigned student and to complete other required tasks. Only when these factors are considered is there an accurate picture of the workload required for each individual clinician.

In addition, these clinicians provide important mental health services to students. The number of students requiring school-based mental health services continues to rise. One in six school-age children have mental health conditions, but only half receive mental health services (NAMI, 2022). Public schools play an important role in the early identification and effective treatment of children with mental health conditions.

Only by establishing maximum caseloads and requiring school districts to consider the workloads of clinicians, can we increase access to necessary special education and related services including school-based mental health services.

**Proposed Action**

We propose amending the school code to include appropriate maximum caseloads based on recommendations from professional organizations such as the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), and the National Association of School Nurses (NASN).