To: All Texas School Board Members  
From: Texas Chaplains  
Re: Reject public school chaplain programs  
Date: August 22, 2023

We, the undersigned chaplains, write in response to the Texas Legislature’s recent passage of SB 763, requiring school districts to vote on whether to create a paid or volunteer chaplain program to “provide support, services, and programs for students.”

**Because of our training and experience, we know that chaplains are not a replacement for school counselors or safety measures in our public schools, and we urge you to reject this flawed policy option:** **It is harmful to our public schools and the students and families they serve.**

There is no requirement in this law that the chaplains refrain from proselytizing while at schools or that they serve students from different religious backgrounds.

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. We are deeply concerned about using chaplains in these roles to provide those services, particularly as the law does not require any specific training or qualifications.

**SB 763 allows a school district to give any employee or volunteer who can pass a background check the title of “chaplain.” This is simply not enough.** Professional chaplains have specific education and expertise to fulfill our role in helping others engage their own religious practices and traditions. Typically, we are required to have a graduate theological degree and be supported by an approved organization connected to our spiritual tradition. In some settings, chaplains also must have one to two years of full-time experience as a religious or spiritual leader. Many of us are ordained in our faith tradition. Additionally, board certified chaplains in health care go through a rigorous certification process, pursuing hundreds of hours of extensive training and hands-on experience.

Our extensive training empowers us to follow the lead of the individuals seeking our spiritual care without imposing our own faith tradition upon them. For example, a Jewish military chaplain will advocate that a Muslim service member be able to pray the five daily prayers while deployed. A Christian hospital chaplain will help an atheist patient explain to her family her peace of mind that there is no afterlife.

Texas Chaplains Say “No” to Public School Chaplain Programs
As trained chaplains, we are not qualified for the duties envisioned by SB 763. We cooperate with mental health counselors – we do not compete with them. Further, professions which help children with sensitive matters, such as therapists and police investigators, typically require special training on how to interview and treat juveniles. Few chaplains have this expertise. Finally, using the school safety allotment to pay for chaplains is wholly inappropriate.

Chaplaincy programs do not train chaplains on active shooter situations or to be public safety professionals.

As trained chaplains, we strongly caution against the government assertion of authority for the spiritual development and formation of our public school children. We would never provide spiritual care to someone without their consent. And when children are involved, parental consent is necessary. Not only are chaplains serving in public schools likely to bring about conflict with the religious beliefs of parents, but chaplains serving in public schools would also amount to spiritual malpractice by the chaplains.

Government-sanctioned chaplains make sense in some settings, but not in our public schools. Many of us serve in contexts in which individuals cannot access their religious services — such as the military, a prison, or hospital — which is hardly the case for children in public school. Military members may have security or language barriers in finding a house of worship while on deployment. Incarcerated individuals are not given a “religious hall pass” to leave prison and attend the corporate worship service of their own choosing. Hospitalized patients may be too sick or far away from their congregations to engage in meaningful religious exercise.

Public school children simply do not face the barriers to religious exercise that service members, prisoners, and patients face. Parents or guardians must have the right to choose the religious leaders who will influence their children’s spiritual journey. Public schools should not interfere or alter parental decisions in the realm of religious exercise or spiritual care.

We are chaplains from a diversity of faith or ethical traditions living in or educated in Texas. We proudly serve(d) in various capacities, including as hospice, hospital, military, prison, or university chaplains.

We urge you to support religious freedom and parental rights by rejecting this harmful program to have government-approved chaplains in our public schools. We believe that a strong public school system is one in which the limited funding for safety and security of students is used to hire the most skilled professionals for those roles. We believe that families, not the government, are entrusted with their children’s spiritual development.

Respectfully,

Texas Chaplains Say “No” to Public School Chaplain Programs
Cantor Sheri Allen
Jewish Hospice Chaplain
Fort Worth ISD

Rev. Stacy Auld
United Methodist Chaplain
Houston ISD, Alvin ISD
Texas A&M University

Dara Austin
The United Methodist Church Chaplain
Dallas ISD
Baylor University, Brite Divinity School

Rev. Tricia Baldwin
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Chaplain
Crowley ISD
University of North Texas

Ms. Sarah Berel-Harrop
Unitarian Universalist Chaplain
Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD
University of Texas Austin

Rev. Todd Boling
Baptist Education Chaplain
Fort Worth ISD

Andrew Bowles
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Chaplain
Dallas ISD
Baylor University, George W. Truett Theological Seminary

Joshua Bridges-Hickey
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Healthcare Chaplain
Brite Divinity School

Rev. Susan Bryan
The United Methodist Church Chaplain
Frisco ISD
Texas Woman's University

Jonah Bryant
Non-Denominational Military, Healthcare Chaplain
Midlothian ISD

Lauren Buck Medeiros
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), United Church of Christ Education Chaplain
Brite Divinity School, Perkins School of Theology

Rev. Kristin Burrow
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Healthcare Chaplain
Fort Worth ISD
Texas Christian University

Dr. Ryan Campbell
Catholic Healthcare Chaplain
Plano ISD
Richland College, Austin College, University of Dallas

Texas Chaplains Say “No” to Public School Chaplain Programs
Michael Carter
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
Healthcare Chaplain
Dallas ISD
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Chaplain Rabbi Michael Tevya Cohen
Jewish
Healthcare Chaplain
Richardson ISD

Rev. Jeni Cook
Baptist
Healthcare Chaplain
Comal ISD
Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University

Sara Cowley
United Methodist
Healthcare Chaplain
Mesquite ISD
Southern Methodist University

Rev. Tracy Dunn
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
Healthcare Chaplain
Fort Worth ISD
Brite Divinity School

Byron Durant
Seventh-Day Adventist
Military, Healthcare, Correctional Rehabilitation Chaplain
Mansfield ISD

Rev. Diana Dworin
Christian
Healthcare Chaplain
Austin ISD
University of Texas at Austin, Seminary of the Southwest

Chaplain Alton Ethridge
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
Military, Healthcare, Education
Bell County ISD

Dr. Pam Foster
Baptist
Healthcare Chaplain
Northwest ISD
Hardin Simmons University

Emily Gabehart-Weuste
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Healthcare Chaplain
Fort Worth ISD
Texas Christian University

Elisabeth Garvin
The United Methodist Church
University Chaplain
Dallas ISD

Rev. R Mark Grace
Baptist
Healthcare Chaplain
Dallas ISD
Howard Payne University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Texas Chaplains Say “No” to Public School Chaplain Programs
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Church/University</th>
<th>Education/Program</th>
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<td>Rev. LeAnn Griffin</td>
<td>Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)</td>
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<td>Healthcare, Hospice, Private Chaplain, Austin ISD</td>
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<td>Andrea Holamon</td>
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<td>Rev. Mark Holmes</td>
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<td>Healthcare Chaplain, Georgetown ISD, Round Rock ISD</td>
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<td>Ashley Hood</td>
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<td>Dr. Samuel Hopkins</td>
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<td>Daniel Horwitz</td>
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<td>Rev. Leigh Jackson</td>
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<td>Annamma Johns</td>
<td>Buddhist</td>
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<td>Remington Johnson</td>
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<td>Rev. Travis Johnson-Esparza</td>
<td>Evangelical Lutheran Church in America</td>
<td>Healthcare Chaplain, Alamo Heights ISD</td>
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<td>Rabbi Nancy Kasten</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>Private Chaplain, Dallas ISD</td>
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Texas Chaplains Say “No” to Public School Chaplain Programs
Rev. Kristin Klade
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Board Certified Healthcare, Hospice Chaplain
Fort Worth ISD

Alexis Lustig
Adventist
Healthcare Chaplain
Southwestern Adventist University

Rev. Kurt Maerschel
The United Methodist Church
Healthcare Chaplain
Richardson ISD
Southern Methodist University

Rev. Dr. Michael Maness
Baptist
Correctional Rehabilitation Chaplain
Woodville ISD
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Feby Mathew
Healthcare Chaplain
Lewisville ISD

Kasey McCollum
Church of Christ
Healthcare Chaplain
Kenedale ISD
Abilene Christian University

Benjamin McCoy
The Episcopal Church
Healthcare Chaplain
Dallas ISD
Southern Methodist University

Rev. Lea McCracken
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Education Chaplain
Fort Worth ISD
Texas Christian University

Texas Chaplains Say “No” to Public School Chaplain Programs
Texas Chaplains Say “No” to Public School Chaplain Programs
Robert Sharff
Jewish Congregational Chaplain
Spring ISD

Rev. Katrina Shawgo
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Hospice Chaplain
Pflugerville ISD
University of North Texas

Rev. Shelley Simmont
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Healthcare Chaplain
New Braunfels ISD
Texas Lutheran University

Rev. Larry Smith
Baptist
Healthcare Chaplain
Belton ISD

Rev. Leslie Smith
The United Methodist Church
Board Certified Healthcare Chaplain
McKinney ISD
Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University

Rev. Evan Solice
Non-denominational Protestant
Healthcare Chaplain
Round Rock ISD
Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Rev. David Stippick
Alliance of Baptists
Hospice Chaplain
Georgetown ISD
Howard Payne University

Robin Sullens
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
Healthcare Chaplain
Dallas ISD

Katherine Tang
The United Methodist Church
Board Certified Chaplain
Cedar Hill ISD

Rev. Johnny Taylor
Southern Baptist Convention
Healthcare Chaplain
Plano ISD

Rev. Lisa Test
The United Methodist Church
Healthcare, Hospice Chaplain
Plano ISD
Perkins School of Theology

Rev. Reann Tiemann
Baptist
Healthcare Chaplain
Richardson ISD

Chelsea Turpen
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
Healthcare Chaplain
Dallas ISD

George W. Truett Theological Seminary

Samuel Turpen
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Hospice Chaplain
Dallas ISD

Texas Chaplains Say “No” to Public School Chaplain Programs
Rev. Heather Velez  
United Methodist  
Hospice Chaplain  
Lamar Consolidated ISD  
Southern Methodist University

Rev. Melissa Walker-Luckett  
Alliance of Baptists  
Healthcare, Hospice Chaplain  
Ferris ISD

Rev. Dr. Cindy Wallace  
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship  
Healthcare Chaplain  
George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University

Rev. Erin Walter  
Unitarian Universalist  
Civic Chaplain  
Austin ISD, Bastrop ISD

Rev. Doug Watts  
United Church of Christ  
Healthcare Chaplain  
Richardson ISD  
Hardin Simmons University

Rev. Deborah Whisnand  
United Church of Christ  
Healthcare Chaplain  
Houston ISD  
Texas Tech University, Rice University

Rev. Linda Wilkerson  
Texas Baptist General Convention  
Healthcare Chaplain  
Dallas ISD

Rev. Alan Wright  
Baptist  
Healthcare Chaplain  
Wylie ISD  
Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University

Rev. Dr. James Wright  
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship  
Healthcare Chaplain  
Austin ISD  
University of North Texas

Marina Yergin  
Jewish  
Congregational Chaplain  
Judson ISD, North East ISD, San Antonio ISD, Alamo Heights ISD

Rev. Paul Yu-Angel  
United Church of Christ  
Board Certified Healthcare Chaplain  
Plano ISD

Rabbi Brian Zimmerman  
Beth El Congregation  
Congregational Chaplain

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