

# Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-186

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL COUNSELORS.

**Vote Date:** 3/14/2018

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 2/26/2018

**File No.:** 131

***Disclaimer:** The following Joint Favorable Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Education Committee

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

SB 186 adds “school counselor” to every state law that currently mentions “guidance counselor”. (While neither “school counselor” or “guidance counselor” is defined in state law, in practice State Department of Education currently issues a school counselor special services certificate endorsement and no longer issues a guidance counselor endorsement. The department continues to recognize the guidance counselor endorsement, however.) Specifically, the bill adds school counselors to the following situations:

1. membership on the committee to coordinate the education of middle school and high school students about manufacturing careers;
2. the State Department of Education’s program to introduce students, parents, and counselors to manufacturing careers;
3. the definition of “mental health professionals” for statutes governing school-based primary mental health programs;
4. the list of school employees who can attest on a student’s public school withdrawal form that the school district provided the student’s parent with information on the educational options available in the school system and community;
5. membership on district and school attendance review teams;
6. the definition of “school employee” for the statute that requires board of education policies prohibiting school employees from (a) preventing a student from participating in physical exercise during the school day as a form of punishment and (b) requiring any kindergarten through grade 12 student to engage in physical activity during the school day as a form of discipline;
7. the definition of “school employee” for statutes governing safe school climate plans;
8. the Office of Higher Education’s required informational offerings about students’ financial assistance affairs;

9. the definition of “counselor” for statutes governing abortion;
10. the list of professional required to report suspected abuse or neglect of individuals who have an intellectual disability or receive autism spectrum disorder services;
11. the definition of “school employee” for statutes governing sex offenses; and
12. the list of professionals to whom a victim may disclose a personal injury and thereby be entitled to compensation through the Office of Victim Services or a victim compensation commissioner.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

### **Dianna Wentzell, Commissioner of the Department of Education:**

Commissioner Wentzell testified on behalf of the Department of Education in favor of SB 186. She stipulated that the Department has no issues with the inclusion of “school counselor” provided that it remains in addition to “guidance counselors” as the session progresses. As they are 68 remaining educators which still hold old counselor endorsements, she asked for the language to remain in the statutes.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

### **Connecticut Association of School Psychologists:**

The Connecticut Association of School Psychologists testified in support of SB 186 and asked for the adoption of a Joint Favorable report for the bill. The Association asserted that the bill reflects the changing role of school counselors in K-12 education’s environment where school counseling is important for the development of every student regardless of his or her grade. Lastly, the Association proposed the following amendment to the bill: “State Board of Education, in collaboration with the CT School Counselor Association, adopt guidelines and recommendations to ensure that all students have access to a comprehensive school counseling programming and that such recommendations ensure that academic, social-emotional and post-secondary and career readiness programming is delivered by a certified school counselor with adequate training and that the State Board of Educational make any such guidelines and recommendations available to local and regional boards of education”.

### **Geno Ayala, School Counselor at New Britain High School:**

Ms. Ayala testified in support of SB 186. She argued that it is time for the multi-dimensional work done by School Counselors to be acknowledged by law. She also asserted that such law enforcement will also pave the way for funding to support “the developmental model of counseling in our schools”.

### **Patriacia, L. Buell, First Year Superintendent in Brooklyn:**

Ms. Buell testified in support of SB 186 for school counselors to provide occupational and mental health counseling.

### **Michelle Catucci, School Counseling Department Chairperson at Cheshire High School and Executive Director of the Connecticut School Counselor Association:**

Ms. Catucci testified in support of SB 186. She argued that the bill will rightfully give every guidance counselor with the required State certification and professional practice to be endorsed as school counselors. Further, she stipulated that, because of the unique role played by school counselors in the K-12 education setting, all students must have access to a

school counselor. In opposition to school social workers and school psychologists, she claimed that school counselors are the only ones that can provide services for all students, namely that of “advocacy for all students, planning and delivering interventions at tiers I, II and III, provide short-term counseling, and program delivery that supports all student’s academic social emotional and college/career development”. Lastly, she asked for the consideration of the following amendment: “The State Board of Education, in collaboration with the Connecticut School Counselor Association, shall adopt guidelines and recommendations to ensure that all students have access to a comprehensive school counseling programming. Such recommendations shall ensure that academic, social-emotional, and post-secondary and career readiness programming is delivered by a certified school counselor with adequate training. The State Board of Education shall make any such guidelines and recommendations available to local and regional boards of education”.

**Dr. Matthew J. Conway, Jr., Superintendent of Schools for Derby Public Schools:**

Dr. Conway testified on behalf of Derby Public Schools in support of SB 186 as to the inclusion of “School Counselor”. He did not express a reason.

**Virginia DeLong, School Counselor at Lebanon Middle School and Chairman of the Board of the Connecticut School Counselor Association:**

Ms. DeLong testified in favor of SB 186. She argued that adding school counselors to the statutes where the current term being used is guidance counselor will reflect reality; a reality where the role of school counselor incorporates that of guidance counselors, providing students with guidance on colleges or career paths but it also incorporates academic support and social emotional learning to all students. She also urged the Committee to address the need for Comprehensive School Counseling programs and asked for consideration of the following amendment: “The State Board of Education, in collaboration with the Connecticut School Counselor Association, shall adopt guidelines and recommendations to ensure that all students have access to a comprehensive school counseling programming. Such recommendations shall ensure that academic, social-emotional, and post-secondary and career readiness programming is delivered by a certified school counselor with adequate training. The State Board of Education shall make any such guidelines and recommendations available to local and regional boards of education”.

**Samantha Eisenberg, College and Career Counselor at Trumbull High School and Public Relations Chair of the Connecticut School Counselor Association:**

Ms. Eisenberg testified in support of SB 186. She argued that the bill gives recognition to the role as well as professional certification of school counselors that are still depicted in statutes by the outdated term of guidance counselors. She also stipulated that, at present, school counselors face many challenges due to high caseloads and a lack of elementary school counselors in 75% of school districts in Connecticut. As such, she called upon the Committee to consider the following amendment as regards to the need of comprehensive school counseling programs: “The State Board of Education, in collaboration with the Connecticut School Counselor Association, shall adopt guidelines and recommendations to ensure that all students have access to a comprehensive school counseling programming. Such recommendations shall ensure that academic, social-emotional, and post-secondary and career readiness programming is delivered by a certified school counselor with adequate training. The State Board of Education shall make any such guidelines and recommendations available to local and regional boards of education”.

**Representative Craig C. Fishbein, Nineteenth Assembly District:**

Representative Fishbein testified in support of SB 186. He argued that the multitude of responsibilities and skills required by educational professionals should be recognized in state statutes.

**Dr. Louisa Foss-Kelly, Professor, Southern Connecticut State University:**

Dr. Foss-Kelly testified in favor of SB 186. She argued that as the profession of school counseling changes, the language to describe it should as well. She stipulated that such change of language will help to clarify and illustrate the proper “role and function of school counselors in working with other school support staff to proactively improve student social-emotional wellbeing, decrease anxiety and improve school and community safety”. Lastly, she claimed that it is in the best interest of the profession that the right terminology be added as school counselors are the most likely to identify serious personal or social-emotional needs.

**Margaret M. Generali, Counselor Educator at Southern Connecticut State University and Member of the Connecticut School Counselor Association:**

Ms. Generali testified in support of SB 186. She argued that the adoption of “school counselor” would reflect reality, as the role of the school counselor has changed over time to meet the needs of students. She also asserted that school counseling programming is planned in response to the needs of students and recommended the following amendment: “The State Board of Education, in collaboration with the Connecticut School Counselor Association, shall adopt guidelines and recommendations to ensure that all students have access to a comprehensive school counseling programming. Such recommendations shall ensure that academic, social-emotional, and post-secondary and career readiness programming is delivered by a certified school counselor with adequate training. The State Board of Education shall make any such guidelines and recommendations available to local and regional boards of education”.

**Kaitlin Gillard, School Counselor at William H. Hall High School:**

Ms. Gillard testified in support of SB 186. She argued that as the role of school counselors, certification requirements and titles have changed, it is important that the language in statutes change as well. She also requested the Committee to consider the amendment proposed by the Connecticut School Counselor Association to have the State Board of Education adopt guidelines and recommendations for a comprehensive school counseling program as school counselors are facing many challenges due to high caseloads and a lack of elementary school counselors in nearly 75% of school districts in the state.

**Maurice H. Hartigan III, President of the Connecticut Counseling Association:**

Mr. Hartigan testified on behalf of the Connecticut Counseling Association in support of SB 186. He argued that “school counselor” should be added to the statutes as they play an essential role in serving the emotional and mental health needs of Connecticut’s students. He further assessed that school counselors are instrumental in identifying serious personal or mental issues. He mentioned that as the requirements evolved so should the term. The passage of such bill will accurately describe the nature of the profession as well as promote a professional identity that will in turn help to attract well-educated and motivated practitioners.

**Lisa Kapitan, School Counselor at Newtown High School:**

Ms. Kapitan testified in support of SB 186. She argued that the change of term may seem like a simple change but its meaning is way greater. She stipulated that the requirements to become a school counselor are way different than those to become a guidance counselor. She also asked the Committee to include the following amendment: “The State Board of Education, in collaboration with the Connecticut School Counselor Association, shall adopt guidelines and recommendations to ensure that all students have access to a comprehensive school counseling programming. Such recommendations shall ensure that academic, social-emotional, and post-secondary and career readiness programming is delivered by a certified school counselor with adequate training. The State Board of Education shall make any such guidelines and recommendations available to local and regional boards of education”.

**Stefan Keller, College Access Program Manager, Connecticut Students for a Dream:**

Mr. Keller testified on behalf of the Connecticut Student for a Dream in support of SB 186. They argued that the bill will shed light on the important role and work done by school counselors. However, they requested that the Committee consider the following amendment: “The State Board of Education, in collaboration with the Connecticut School Counselor Association, shall adopt guidelines and recommendations to ensure that all students have access to a comprehensive school counseling programming. Such recommendations shall ensure that academic, social-emotional, and post-secondary and career readiness programming is delivered by a certified school counselor with adequate training. The State Board of Education shall make any such guidelines and recommendations available to local and regional boards of education”. They suggested that they are many places where counselors want to help but are overwhelmed with high caseloads or burdened by obstacles preventing them from providing the comprehensive services they are trained to provide.

**Edith R. Main, Spanish Teacher at Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School, New London, CT:**

Ms. Main testified in support of SB 186. She argued that “today’s students need pro-active counselors who are prepared and available to address issues of today’s youth”. She asserted that some students need much more than simple “guidance”, they ought to see school counselors as caring adults who can intervene on their behalf or with whom they can discuss their problems. Lastly, she requested that the Committee include the Connecticut School Counselor Association proposal that the Board of Education adopt guidelines and recommendations for a comprehensive school counseling program.

**Jennifer Parzych, Assistant Professor and School Counseling Program Coordinator at Southern Connecticut State University and Government Relations Co-Chair and Treasurer at the Connecticut School Counselor Association:**

Ms. Parzych testified in support of SB 186. She argued that the language amendment will accurately identify the 97% certified counselors by the State Department of Education as school counselors. In addition, as she stipulated that, at present not all students have access to a school counselor even though comprehensive school counseling programs have shown to improve attendance, decrease suspension rates, lead to greater achievement, high graduation and post-secondary enrollment rates. As such, she urged the Committee to include the Connecticut School Counselor Association proposal that the Board of Education adopt guidelines and recommendations for a comprehensive school counseling program.

**Natalie R. Starling, Assistant Professor, Southern Connecticut State University:**

Ms. Starling testified in support of SB 186. In supporting the inclusion of “school counselor”, she focused her argumentation on the importance and impact of labels and titles on a person’s ability to function in their work environment stipulating that people are responsive to titles. She also stipulated that almost all counselors that work in Connecticut schools are state certified school counselors since the Department no longer endorses guidance counselors. As respect to school counseling programs, she argued for the delivery of mental health services. In addition, she asserted that the lack of a state-wide counseling program is a burden on Connecticut’s students and, as such, she urged the Committee to adopt the amendment proposed by the Connecticut School Counselor Association: “The State Board of Education, in collaboration with the Connecticut School Counselor Association, shall adopt guidelines and recommendations to ensure that all students have access to a comprehensive school counseling programming. Such recommendations shall ensure that academic, social-emotional, and post-secondary and career readiness programming is delivered by a certified school counselor with adequate training. The State Board of Education shall make any such guidelines and recommendations available to local and regional boards of education”.

**Erica Strong, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Language Arts Teacher and Team Leader, Lebanon Middle School:**

Taking the example of the valuable work conducted by her middle school counselor, Ms. Strong advocated for the benefits and need of school counselors in elementary schools. She argued that having the support of school counselors would only positively benefit students receiving constant academic, career and social emotional supports. She asserted that as children move from kid to pre-teen, pre-teen to teen and teen to adult, it is essential for students to have an academic as well as mental and emotional support at school. As such, she asked the Committee to adopt the amendment proposed by the Connecticut School Counselor Association making the argument that for all students to succeed, every school should have school counselors from grades K-12.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None expressed.

**Reported by: Adeline Dubout**

**Date: April 9, 2018**