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H.B. No. 7148 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNLIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFORE

Appropriations Committee Hearing

March 6, 2019

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle, and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Margaret Generali and I am a school counselor educator at Southern Connecticut State University and a member of the Connecticut School Counselor Association’s Government Relations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in matters related to H.B. No. 7148 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNLIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFORE. Specifically, supporting increased access to student support services across the state.

It is not an understatement to say that students in Connecticut benefit from the support of strong school leaders, talented teachers, and supportive helping professionals. The roles and responsibilities of helping professionals in schools are varied, yet they have an overarching theme in the school setting to support academic achievement. These professionals have a collective responsibility to not only help students to participate in an academic program, but to navigate the sometimes-complex social climate of schools.

Although academics are at the core of education. Schools include broader goals for student development when preparing their vision for student success. Trends emerge such as mind, body and character development, integrity, compassion, resilience, sense of safety, connection with others, confidence and competence. The helping professionals employed in public schools, the school counselors, school psychologist and school social workers, provide the necessary support to help students reach academic goals but also importantly, help them aspire to these broader goals.

Although the preparation is slightly different for each of these helping professionals, they provide essential support for students needing individual guidance. School counselors, school psychologists and school social workers share common tasks in a school setting. They all participate in the pre-referral process or RTI, collaborate on student interventions and monitor progress, provide referral and collaborate with outside service providers, provide consultation and parent education, and provide programming to address school climate or at-risk student issues.
Uniquely, school psychologists work with select students to provide assessment services, identify student eligibility and develop individualized education plans for special education students, provide academic support plans for individual students and on-going counseling to support IEP goals. School counselors work with all students, provide programming to address academic, social-emotional and post-secondary/career development, provide orientation and transitions from school to school and school to career, and provide short term counseling and group counseling services. School social workers act as liaisons between home, school and community, complete home visits and truancy interventions, provide social-emotional and behavioral assessments, and provide on-going counseling to meet IEP goals.

Most importantly, these professional support the mental health needs of students in schools. Mental health needs for school aged children are on the rise. In this age of unlimited technology, climate issues and high stakes testing, students are reporting an increase in anxiety, depression, self-harm and substance abuse. As well, students are struggling to develop healthy coping mechanisms such as emotion regulation and stress reduction. School support staff are essential in identifying and supporting student mental health needs.

Please earmark part of the ECS funding, or a separate pot of money, to be specifically allocated to districts to fund school support staff including school counselors, school social workers and school psychologists.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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