CONNECTICUT SCHOOL COUNSELOR ASSOCIATION

Connecticut School Counselor Association

A Chartered Division of the American School Counselors Association

Testimony of Virginia DeLong
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Chairman of the Board, CT School Counselor Association
in regards to
SB 854 (RAISED) COMMERCE 'AN ACT PROMOTING CAREERS IN MANUFACTURING TO PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS AND ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY THE DEMAND FOR CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS.
Commerce Committee Public Hearing, February 21, 2019

Senator Hartley, Representative Simmons, and members of the Commerce Committee, my name is Virginia DeLong and I am a school counselor in Lebanon and Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Connecticut School Counselor Association. Thank you for the opportunity to offer **testimony on Senate Bill 854- An Act Promoting Careers in Manufacturing to Public School Students and establishing a task force to study the demand for career and technical education teachers.**

We as school counselors are aware of the specific workforce needs within Connecticut. There is currently a shortage of manufacturing workers and law enforcement will soon be in a crisis as half of the current officers will be retired by 2023 (according to a recent NPR story). Because career exploration and education is our mission and one of three essential domains of the Comprehensive School Counseling Program, we support the need to best educate our students on careers in particular where there are shortage areas. We want to work with the various partners to provide all of our students with equal opportunities.

This bill as proposed states that it would "require guidance counselors and school counselors to provide materials concerning manufacturing, military and law enforcement careers to students." There are several concerns with requiring such a mandate.

The first concern is that students should be given a wide variety of options and materials in order to make the best career choices for themselves. By requiring materials be provided specifically to expose students to "manufacturing, military and law enforcement careers" and not to the full breadth of available options, counselors would essentially be influencing students in one direction rather than the student making the choice or the decision for themselves. School counselors strongly believe that it is our job to meet our students where their interests, strengths and values lay and that students should be exposed to many different careers, given more information on careers they are most interested in, and set up a plan to pursue those careers. Students throughout the State of CT are currently exposed to "manufacturing, military and law enforcement" careers through a variety of means, including career fairs, individual planning meetings, interest inventories, job shadows, pre-apprenticeship programs, unpaid internships and more.

Another concern is the availability of materials and professional development. When counselors have the resources to give to their students they are willing to make them readily available and accessible to students. Colleges tend to be more proactive in providing public schools with materials. We would encourage the committee to address the lack of accessibility to materials pertaining to manufacturing and other careers where there is a need in the state of Connecticut and provide professional development opportunities for school counselors to best utilize these materials.

Lastly, the issue of equitable access to school counselors and comprehensive school counseling programs remains CSCA's deepest concern. Currently in CT, we have 1400 school counselors. Connecticut has a severe lack of elementary school counselors in particular with only about 28% of elementary schools employing school counselors. Waiting until high school to introduce careers is much too late. Research tells us that most students by age 9 have already discarded career options. In other words, even with greater emphasis on exploring specific careers and Connecticut workforce needs, children will repeatedly discount many careers even with increased exposure. A solution to this problem is to begin career exploration early and often. This is what school counselors are trained to do, and when a comprehensive school counseling program is implemented in districts across all grade levels, greater career development takes place. However, without schools being adequately staffed to do this, a requirement of this sort will be incredibly difficult to carry out.

School counselors through comprehensive school counseling programs, work with students on career development and post secondary planning as a main tenet of our work. We have a responsibility to each of our students to introduce them to a wide variety of careers, including those in this bill. The work that we do does not solely focus on advanced degrees, but rather our job is to provide students with a variety of post-secondary options. It is important for counselors to meet students where they are in terms of their career interests and provide them with all options based on their identified interests. Although this has been the work of school counselors for many, many years, in 2012 Connecticut began requiring schools to "create a student success plan for each student enrolled in a public school , beginning in grade six" (CSDE, 2012). This plan includes the students career choice/plan.

The Connecticut School Counselor Association is appreciative of the committee's attention to these important career options for our students. We welcome the opportunity to work more closely with organizations and businesses through professional development opportunities for school counselors in order to continue to grow our knowledge on the many career options that are available to our students. This will ensure that we can continue to help our students make strong, informed and educated decisions about their futures.

As an association, we are more than happy to continue these conversations and be part of the solution to increase the Connecticut workforce. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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