Testimony of Ms. Rachel Arnett
Career Academy Counselor, Newington High School
in support of
S.B. 956 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELOR PROGRAM.
Education Committee - March 6, 2019

March 4, 2019

To the esteemed members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to offer testimony in support of Senate Bill 956 - AN ACT CONCERNING A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELOR PROGRAM.

My name is Rachel Arnett, and I am currently in the midst of my second year as a School Counselor in the Newington Public School system. I am also a current resident of Bloomfield, graduate of Bloomfield High School, and a three-time graduate of the University of Connecticut. Today I write to you not only as a school counselor, but as a former teacher, and the mother of a 5 year old son who is lucky enough to receive counseling services at the elementary level.

As a certified school counselor, I have received extensive training in supporting the academic, social-emotional and college/career development of my students, and I take my job extremely seriously. I left teaching to pursue a career in school counseling after becoming acutely aware that so many of my students struggled daily with a variety of issues that impacted their focus, grit and ability to reach their full potential. Every day as a school counselor, I interact with students, parents and guardians, teachers, administrators, admissions counselors, community partners and others, all with a singular purpose: empowering my students to succeed on their own terms. This is what school counselors do; we undertake this work via an organized and methodical approach, researching, developing and implementing both proactive programming as well as reactive protocol and counseling methodologies.

“Nationally Recognized Exemplary Secondary School”
In the past two years, not a single day of work has been the same as the day before, and no two students could have been painted with the same brush. It is my job to provide students individual counseling, small group lessons and large group classroom instruction on topics including (but not limited to) anxiety/depression, eating disorders, gender and sexuality, the impact of concussions, the college application process, options for vocational education and certification, employability skills, internship acquisition, legal rights afforded to students with 504 plans or IEPs, and analyzing and reforming school policies as needed to institute equitable and restorative practices. In schools across Connecticut, when a student needs assistance, a school counseling office is usually where they head first. It is an unfortunate fact that many Connecticut students are impacted every day by systemic inequities, personal medical and mental health issues, difficult familial financial circumstances and more. If any population is ready to tackle these issues and empower students to succeed despite barriers, it is school counselors. We are also poised to tackle issues such as current shortages in qualified applicants for careers in manufacturing and law enforcement.

It is my hope that you will choose to offer your support to SB 956. The language of this bill would “require the State Board of Education to adopt guidelines for a comprehensive school counselor program.” This would be a tremendous step forward for all of Connecticut’s students, particularly on the elementary school level, as currently, fewer than 25% of Connecticut students in grades K-5 have access to a school counselor or comprehensive school counseling program. Recent research has shown that students in districts with counselors on the elementary school level have improved performance outcomes versus those without (Parzych, Donahue, Gaesser, Chiu, 2019), regardless of DRG placement. I would also ask that you consider adding to the language of this bill the ASCA (American School Counselor Association) recommended and research-supported counselor-to-student ratio of 1-250 and that these services are to be provided by certified school counselors, guaranteeing the appropriate education and training to implement a comprehensive program.

My son is currently finishing his last year of preschool before kindergarten, and he is lucky enough to have access to a school counselor in his school, unlike the majority of Connecticut’s students. In the past year, she has advocated for him in a variety of ways, including meeting with him on an individual basis to support his transition to a multi-age classroom, processing both positive and negative social interactions, developing behavior plans and supporting his emotional wellbeing, and most recently, helping to initiate the process of a referral for Special Education services. Her work has been unerringly empathetic and student-centered, and it is my hope that all students in CT will one day have access to the same care and support my son has been able to thrive under, and that we, the school counselors of Connecticut, are prepared to provide.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at 860-666-5611 x1263 or at rarnett@npsct.org.

Thank you for your time,

Ms. Rachel M F Arnett
Career Academy Counselor
Newington High School

"Nationally Recognized Exemplary Secondary School"