Testimony to the Education Committee of the CT Legislature
March 6th, 2019

Testimony in Support of: S.B. 956 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELOR PROGRAM

Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, Representative McCarty, Senator Bertel, and esteemed members of the Education Committee:

We, Connecticut Students for a Dream (C4D), strongly call on the members of the Education Committee to pass Senate Bill 956- AN ACT CONCERNING A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELOR PROGRAM.

C4D is a statewide, youth-led network that fights for the rights of undocumented youth and their families. We are proud to be the only organization in Connecticut that is led by and for immigrant youth directly impacted by the issues we seek to address.

The Migration Policy institute estimates that there are over 9,000 undocumented young people ages 3-17 in K-12 schools in Connecticut. Schools serve as one of the main resources for undocumented students and families as well as a way for students to get connected to organizations in the community.

School counselors play a key role within this school support network at the elementary, middle, and high school level. Whether it be supporting students and families in getting connected to legal resources, planning for life after high school, or handling crisis that may come up such as the deportation of a parent or family member, all of the specialized support and expertise school counselors provide goes a long way in helping undocumented students be successful both inside and outside the classroom.

This is the reason why ensuring students have access to a comprehensive school counseling program is so important. Certified school counselors are specially trained to provide academic, social-emotional, and post-secondary and career readiness programming, all things that undocumented students are desperately in need of. It is not just high school where school counselors are needed either; access to elementary and middle school counselors is important too. We meet many middle school counselors who talk about connecting families to legal resources, finding families basic resources like food and clothing, and ensuring parents feel safe and comfortable in engaging with the school.

1 “Profile of the Unauthorized Population: Connecticut.” Migration Policy Institute. Accessed March 5th, 2019
https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/CT
However, all of this good work can be hindered by high student-to-school counselor ratios and lack of funding to student support services. Research in Connecticut shows that lower-performing schools tend to have ratios over 100 students per counselor higher than high performing schools\(^2\). Due to many systemic injustices, many of these lower performing schools are in urban areas, where many undocumented students attend school. Higher school counselor ratios means that counselors have less time to devote to each student and with less time, counselors may be less likely to have capacity to give support to students like undocumented students that may need more attention and resources than other students.

For this reason we encourage the committee to amend the underlying bill to include the Connecticut School Counselor Association proposal to also have the State Board of Education adopt guidelines and recommendations for appropriate student-to-school counselor ratios and funding to increase access to student support services.

We strongly stand in support of S.B. 956 and urge the Committee to consider amending the bill as proposed above and to ultimately vote favorably and ensure that this legislation becomes reality.

On behalf of the C4D Community,

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https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Publications/Research-Release-Parzych.pdf