Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, Representative McCarty, Senator Bertel, and esteemed members of the Education Committee, my name is James Gorss and I am a School Counselor in Hartford, a member of the CT School Counseling Association. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 956 - AN ACT CONCERNING A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELOR PROGRAM.

Senator McCrory, Representative McCarty, and Representative McGee, I address you specifically in this letter for a reason to support Bill 956 for your relationship with a comprehensive model, whether you were aware of that relationship or not. Representative McGee and Senator McCrory have had a direct relationship with the benefits of a comprehensive model. Representative McCarty, the benefits would benefit school choice and the accountability of schools in ensuring equitable access for all students to post-secondary options.

Senator McCrory, your son had an amazing opportunity that contributed to his attendance at an elite high school in the state. At the charter school your son attended at the time he was in 8th grade, about 25-35% of the students went on to some of the best schools in the state, public and private. The year your son graduated from 8th grade, there were over 3 million dollars in scholarships awarded to students! More importantly, the foundation served as a model for younger students to see what their future could look like. I’m talking over 60,000 in scholarships a year for a student from Hartford. Mr. McGee, member of this committee, you spoke at a middle school graduation ceremony that two of the students, ended up attending Ivy League schools just a short time ago. The comprehensive model at the schools, systemically implemented academic, social emotional, and career development to help facilitate the growth of the young men and women of the great city of Hartford.

The schools had comprehensive school counseling models that helped facilitate the students path to that school. At the charter school, the comprehensive counseling program was established because there was only one counselor, and an opportunity to build upon an amazing community. The comprehensive model initially included school stakeholders, established what our mission and vision were, and proactively identified a need for more support and a desire to get more students to a wide ranging of schools. In addition, the model included daily classroom lessons for all grades as an encore class such as health or music. It helped prepare students and families by engaging and hosting school fairs and visits, building and establishing partnerships with local businesses, identifying barriers such as admission tests and transportation to give students the options and school choice they deserve. School counselors work proactively, in systemic, accountable, data informed processes that support all students in preparing them to fulfill their potential.

We can’t control legislation that got us here and it is not time to debate school choice or regionalization, but we can control future legislation and the positive impact it will have on a student without regard of their school type. A school counselor operating in a comprehensive program will benefit all students, whether they are regionalized, chartered, magnet, public, and even an unintended consequence of Scheff vs. O’neil. By providing this service, we are creating
opportunities for our future as a state. Senate Bill 956 ensures all students will receive the programming that is fundamental to equitable access to success.

This is the beginning of equitable and accountable change. It won’t matter what comes before the committee in the future, if we don’t start with this change now. Republican or Democrat, Senate Bill 956 is a necessity for what the future holds.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to working with you in the future.

James Gorss
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