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

I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 956 because, as a current counselor-in-training, I see the incredible value that a Comprehensive School Counseling Program offers for students and schools as a whole. Comprehensive School Counseling Programs grant all students access to a multifaceted and holistic program - one that fosters and supports the academic, social-emotional, and career development of all students. There are currently no requirements for school counseling programs to be implemented at any level in Connecticut school districts. Even more concerning, fewer than 25% of Connecticut’s elementary school children have access to school counselors and comprehensive school counseling programming. There is a vast amount of research that shows the benefits of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program on student outcomes. Not only are comprehensive school counseling programs associated with improved student attendance, reduced discipline, improved grades, and increased SAT scores, they can also positively impact graduation rates and college-going rates. With these school counseling programs, which are comprehensive in scope, preventative in design, and developmental in nature, we, as a state, can provide our students with the tools, skills, and resources that will help them reach their goals and become successful and productive citizens in our community.

I would ask that you 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. By lowering student-to-counselor ratios, school counselors will be able to more effectively deliver a comprehensive school counseling program, one that meets the developmental needs of students and supports their continued positive development as the future leaders of our society.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Paula Kotara