Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, Representative McCarty, Senator Berthel, and respected members of the Education Committee, my name is Eileen Melody and I am the 7th and 8th grade School Counselor in Mansfield and a member of the Board of Directors of the Connecticut School Counselor Association. I am grateful for the opportunity to share testimony in support of Senate Bill 956- AN ACT CONCERNING A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELOR PROGRAM.

The Connecticut School Counselor Association (CSCA) is the professional organization representing the state’s more than 1400 school counselors, while promoting leadership and advancing the professional school counseling identity. We are a charter division of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) which provides us with current and relevant information to enhance our skill level and professionalism.

I strongly support Senate Bill 956 because this bill brings to all Connecticut students equal access to a comprehensive school counseling program. It will require that the State Department of Education, in collaboration with the Connecticut School Counselor Association, provide to districts guidelines and recommendations for comprehensive school counseling programming to address the academic, social-emotional, post-secondary and career readiness needs by a certified school counselor with adequate training.

Currently, there are no requirements for school counseling programs to be implemented at any level in Connecticut school districts. This is unfortunate and a disservice to Connecticut students. Research shows that implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program has a positive impact on student outcomes, including improved attendance, reduced discipline, improved grades, increased SAT scores, increased graduation rates, increased college-going and persistence rates. A 2017, ASCA position paper, The School Counselor and Comprehensive School Counseling Programs, shares that “School counselors design and deliver comprehensive school counseling programs that improve a range of student learning and behavioral outcomes (Carey & Dimmitt, 2012). These programs are comprehensive in scope, preventive in design and developmental in nature.” Connecticut has not yet acted upon the findings of this and other research.

We know now, thanks to recent research in Connecticut (Parzych, Donohue, Gaesser, Chiu, 2019), that students in districts with elementary school counselors have improved performance outcomes versus districts without, regardless of location or socio-economic status. The current status in Connecticut is that fewer than 25% of Connecticut’s elementary school children have access to school counselors and comprehensive school counseling programming.

The enactment of this bill can change this and lead to positive student outcomes for all of Connecticut’s students. As a Connecticut School Counselor, I am passionate about equitably advocating for the needs of all students so that they can reach their academic, career, and personal goals without facing barriers. When all of Connecticut students have equal opportunity to work with a certified school counselor who will advocate for them, lead them to appropriate academic interventions, and help them explore their futures, then we have met our responsibility of caring for our students.
While I recognize that the delivery of comprehensive school counseling program is/ can be a collaborative effort among school personnel, school counselors and other support staff are often the lead staff members in school buildings who deliver the comprehensive school counseling program. To this end, I, and the CSCA respectfully encourage the committee to address the lack of adequate support staff in all schools by amending 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.

The recent Connecticut research quoted above (Parzych, Donohue, Gaesser, Chiu, 2019), identified that higher performing schools had on average lower school counselor-to-student ratio (High School Level = 1:182, Middle School level = 1:211) while low-performing schools had on average significantly higher school counselor-to-student ratio: High School Level – 1:285, Middle School Level = 1:891.

The CSCA is willing to continue working with this committee. Please feel free to contact me or a member of the Connecticut School Counselor Association Board of Directors and use our expertise as a resource so that we can work together to achieve our common purpose of supporting and educating Connecticut's children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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