Testimony of Joanna Okosky, School Counselor
Ledyard Middle School

in support of
S.B. 956 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELOR PROGRAM.
Education Committee- March 6, 2019

Representatives Conley, McCarty, and Sanchez. Senators Blumenthal, Somers, Murphy, McCrory, and Bertel, and esteemed members of the Education Committee, my name is Joanna Okosky and I am a School Counselor at Ledyard Middle School. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 956- AN ACT CONCERNING A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELOR PROGRAM.

Senate Bill 956, in conjunction with the Connecticut School Counselor Association, will adopt best practices to ensure all students have access to a comprehensive School Counseling Program. As such, all students will be able to receive programming by a certified School Counselor with expertise in strengthening academic, social, emotional, and behavioral potential within every student. School Counselors also support postsecondary and career readiness through their comprehensive School Counseling Programs. With implementation of Senate Bill 956, the state board shall make the guidelines available to local and regional boards of education and published on the Department of Education’s website.

In Ledyard, we will be introducing the sixth grade into the middle school for the first time in the upcoming school year (2019-20). Currently, we do not have concrete support for an additional School Counselor. This will increase my School Counselor to student ratio from approximately 1:190 to 1:275. My colleague, Patty Pollin, and I take pride in helping our students discover their potential by building imperative relationships. Positive and safe relationships fuel student learning and success. We are privileged to keep these relationships with students through their time in middle school. We naturally become a "go to" person until they graduate 8th grade and even beyond as they transition into adulthood. We work with all students individually, in small groups, and within the classroom. Our work within the classroom utilizes programming to strengthen social and emotional student learning in addition to facilitating career and college readiness. I am significantly concerned regarding our ability to address our students needs and continue our School Counseling Program with a potentially increasing caseload.
It is incredibly troublesome that there are no requirements for School Counseling Programs to be implemented at any level in Connecticut. Fewer than 25% of Connecticut's elementary school children have access to School Counselors and comprehensive School Counseling Programs. School Counselors are often assigned out of scope responsibilities that impact our ability to help our students.

All students deserve a proactive, preventive, and comprehensive School Counseling Program. School Counselors are an imperative part of a student's educational team who tirelessly and continually advocates to support them. We are the unsung liaisons of each school between students, parents, administration, and community resources.

As such, I ask that you amend the underlying bill to include the Connecticut School Counselor Association proposal to 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.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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