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

Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, Representative McCarty, Senator Berthel, and esteemed members of the Education Committee, my name Jennifer Parzych and I am a school counselor educator at Southern Connecticut State University, as well as a member of the Connecticut School Counselor Association’s Government Relations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 956- AN ACT CONCERNING A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELOR PROGRAM.

A comprehensive school counseling program is one that is planned, sequential, based on promoting academic, social-emotional, and career development in all students, in grades K-12. The delivery of services is both proactive and preventative, as well as responsive in times of individual needs. A comprehensive school counseling program is also one that has accountability at its core, intentionally planning and evaluating how students different as a result of the program. School counselors implementing their program in a comprehensive model are trained to demonstrate evidence of effectiveness of interventions at each tier of RTI.

School counselors, working within a comprehensive model, are integral to the school community as they are on the frontlines of recognizing barriers to student success. In addition to individual advising, one of the key services provided to all students is classroom guidance lessons. The curriculum component is intentionally designed around the domains of academic, social-emotional and career development (aligned to the Core Standards). It was through the curriculum that as a middle school counselor, I built rapport with all students so that they saw me as a trusted resource to turn to when managing in school became difficult. The curriculum in a comprehensive school counseling program becomes the foundation which the remaining services come from. It is preventive and educational in nature, and the majority of students learn the skills needed for success after graduation through this. As in RTI, some need a bit more support beyond the primary intervention. School counselors working within a comprehensive program can identify the needs, provide short-term responsive services, and work with students and families to advocate for increased academic, behavioral, and emotional supports if needed. This is achieved through the school counselor’s collaborative, advocacy, and leadership efforts.

In some cases, where caseloads are especially burgeoning, school counselors do the best they can to implement the model but simply are unable to for many reasons. The rise in mental health needs impacting our students are issues that cannot be overlooked; the CDC reports 1 in 5 students experience significant anxiety and depression. When school counselors are responsible for caseloads greater than 200 – 250, and emergent mental health needs impact roughly 20% of their caseload, school counselors find themselves oftentimes needed to postpone or eliminate the preventative side of their services to attend to the immediate counseling needs. As a state, and at local levels, it is unconscionable to forgo the prevention side of intervention. This also means the career development side of the comprehensive
school counseling program gets side-lined, and preparing the whole-child for life after high school is our collective goal as educators.

I have been actively involved with research in Connecticut over the past two years, seeking to understand the impact of school counselor-to-student ratios on student outcomes. A conversation about implementing a comprehensive school counseling program cannot be had without one that recognizing that equity and access to school counselors is a significant challenge. Key findings from this study (Parzych, Donohue, Gaesser, Chiu, 2019) include: 1) disparate ranges of school counselor-to-student ratios exist in Connecticut, dependent on grade level and location 2) Socioeconomic status and community resources have an impact on the ability of school counselors to effectively deliver comprehensive school counseling programs, and 3) Students in districts with elementary school counselors have improved performance outcomes versus districts without. These performance indicators reduced chronic absenteeism, reduced suspension rates, increased achievement on state-testing, increased graduation rates, increased college entrance and persistence rates.

At the heart of a comprehensive school counseling program is student success. This further means that it is essential that 80% of a school counselor’s work is in providing direct services with students (i.e., curriculum delivery, short-term counseling), and 20% of their time providing indirect services for students (i.e., consultation, parent meetings). School counselors with the best intention of implementing a comprehensive program are often thwarted in their efforts when non-counseling activities are given to them (i.e., testing coordinator, clerical). With the Education Committee’s favorable action on raised S.B. 956, the State Board of Education will work with the Connecticut School Counselor Association to adopt guidelines to support administrators in their understanding of the role, function, and impact of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program. We must move beyond simply reacting in times of crisis for students, and fully support proactive measures that are preventive in nature. School counselors are uniquely trained to implement a comprehensive school counseling program.

It should be noted that 24 states plus the District of Columbia, require school counseling across all grade levels, K – 12. In the Northeast, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania are the only states who do not have require school counseling K-12. New Jersey, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine all require school counseling across all grade levels, with New York most recently adding legislation for implementing comprehensive school counseling programs in all districts (2018).

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.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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