Testimony of Laura Stabile  
St. Paul Catholic High School  
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 Bertel, and esteemed members of the Education Committee, my name is Laura Stabile and I am a school counselor in St. Paul Catholic High School, Bristol and Connecticut School Counselor Association Board Secretary. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 956- AN ACT CONCERNING A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELOR PROGRAM.

[PLEASE DO NOT COPY AND PASTE BUT EXPLAIN SOMETHING AS FOLLOWS] Senate Bill 956 acknowledges the importance in the holistic well-being of students for development that occurs at crucial life stages of the child. The State Department of Education along with Connecticut School Counselor Association has empowered and advocated for the guidelines and recommendations to ensure that all students have access to a comprehensive school counseling program. This awareness of student need will ensure that all students have access to a program that provides academic, social-emotional and post-secondary and career readiness programming by a certified school counselor with adequate training. With your support, the state board will make the guidelines available to local and regional boards of education and published on the Internet website of the Department of Education. Currently, there are no requirements for school counseling programs to be implemented at any level in Connecticut school districts. Fewer than 25% of Connecticut’s elementary school children have access to school counselors and comprehensive school counseling programming.

As someone who has worked for the Bristol Public Schools and am currently at St. Paul Catholic High School, I can easily attest that while there are many differences between the two school systems, the needs of the student have not changed. There is a growing population of students overwhelmed with mental health concerns, future planning and goals, and academic expectations. Implementing a comprehensive school counseling curriculum and program would help make the shift from triage to proactively affecting students so that all have access to tools and resources for success. As a school counselor at Bristol Eastern High School, my caseload was often double to triple the average teacher caseload and I would be expected to attend 3-5 weekly meetings for 504 and special education, a weekly student intervention team (SRBI) meeting, and a weekly administrative meeting that discussed students who needed interventions for rotating topics of truancy, graduation retention, policy, and 504 caseload check-ins and interventions. Each meeting, I walked away with the need to follow up with these students and little time was afforded to students who did not fall on this list of high priority students or those who advocated their own personal needs. A comprehensive school counseling program and reduced caseload would encourage districts to shift from a model that focuses on a percentile of students to providing resources and connections to all students and prevent some of the crisis situations that often occurred. In my current school, I have a reduced caseload of 165 students and can connect with each grade through a range of interventions including small group grade level curriculum, check-ins on a monthly basis, implement monthly career panels that students can attend during lunch, and have more meaningful conversations with students to create lasting change. While there are still students who may have moments of crisis, the connection and preventative measures initiated have reduced the frequency that I have noted historically. It is not that my training or job description is any different from what I did at a public school, it is that there is a systemic support of
reaching students and families before a crisis takes place and connecting with all students on my caseload rather than the select 40 that need immediate attention.

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. I have personally seen what a difference it can make to have a preventative model in place for both the school counselor and systemically and can attest that implementing a comprehensive curriculum may not be easy, but it is necessary.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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