Testimony of Shannon Thomas  
Graduate Student, Southern Connecticut State University  
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 Shannon Thomas and I am a third year school counseling Master’s program Student at Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven. 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 adds that guidelines and recommendations will ensure that all students have access to comprehensive school counseling programs in schools across Connecticut. These programs provide academic, social/emotional, and college and career readiness support that is essential to success. The guidelines being proposed also ensure that students will have access to a school counselor who is properly trained. 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.

I am currently in my final year of the three-year Master in Science program required to become a school counselor. As such, I am an intern completing the 700-hour requirement within a full school year at the middle school level, and I have completed 120 hours of practicum experience at the high school level. I see the need every day for more comprehensive counseling programs for our students. Students come into middle school not knowing what a school counselor is, or the benefits of having one readily available to them. School counselors first and foremost help students who are struggling academically, socially, and emotionally, but preventative programming can help remedy and prevent these issues much sooner than that- providing struggling students with more opportunities for growth and success. Through classroom guidance lessons, group work, and individual meetings with students, school counselors play a crucial role in helping students succeed. I am lucky to intern in a district that has school counselors for each grade level, but there are many districts who do not have nearly as many, if any, during such a crucial time in students’ lives.

In addition, school counselors work closely with school psychologists and school social workers. I often see that school counselors are the ones who first become aware of a situation, as they work with all students, and then confer with these other support services. There is also much interaction between school counselors and administration, teachers, and parents within the school district every day. The American School Counseling Association recommends a counselor to student ratio of 250:1. When those numbers get higher, there is much less personalized interaction with students and their families. School counselors have a much more difficult time providing comprehensive school counseling to all of their students. Especially when it comes to college search and preparation at the high school level, that individualized advisement and support is extremely important to a student’s post-secondary success.

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.

Sincerely,
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