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Proposed S.B. No. 2 An Act Expanding Preschool and Mental and Behavioral Services for Children.

H.B. No. 5001 (Raised) An Act Concerning Children's Mental Health.

Good afternoon to the distinguished members of the Public Health Committee and Committee on Children. My name is Mykah Knight, I live in West Haven, and I work with the Connecticut Citizen Action Group. I am testifying in support of HB 5001 and SB 2. This pandemic has been a painful struggle for so many families and school workers in Connecticut. The COVID pandemic has further exposed and exacerbated Connecticut's mental health issues and pushed many to the brink of desperation. These issues demand a bold response— families are suffering and our state has a responsibility to meet their demands.

The Covid pandemic has had a major impact on mental health in all school districts of Connecticut. This pandemic has limited our overall access to mental health resources. An example of this is the quality of mental health resources available in education. Our organization has surveyed around 100 people statewide on their opinions regarding pandemic relief school funding issues. We've found that despite infrastructure taking up the majority of funding efforts, almost 60% of our surveyors believed that funding should focus more on the emotional needs of children, teachers, and families. I believe this all goes to show how essential passing HB 5001 and SB 2 would be with addressing the needs of the community. All of this was an issue prior to Covid however the pandemic has exacerbated these issues tremendously within the few past years. I believe that this pandemic has highlighted this matter to a point where it is intolerable and now we must take the opportunity to change this moving forward. An increased investment into expanding mental health and behavioral services within schools would benefit the parents, children, and teachers from these communities. It will allow children to have access to more psychological care. This in return will lead to happier and healthier children which ultimately creates better homes and schools. I also believe that HB 5001 will implement a plan that can endorse social workers to create positive change within their communities as well. I support these bills because it aims towards uplifting youth. It will improve the overall mental health quality in children and it will also push families and teachers from these communities to work harder in their districts to make sure that everyone benefits from it. This investment can alter the statistics of low performing students of color to high performing students just by offering adequate mental healthcare services. The state needs progressive policies in order for us to be a leading example to all states across the nation. There is a mental health crisis that we can't ignore; this can be the nextstep in the right direction.

We have an unprecedented opportunity to improve the quality of living for children and families across Connecticut. We have the chance to approach this mental health crisis in a way that supports its clients and its workers. I urge the Committee to have the courage to make the right choice and pass HB 5001 and SB 2. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.