

Dear Legislature Special Committee (particularly all three sub-committees),

This is a testimony to further support hiring and/or keeping school social workers in every public school throughout the country. As a school social worker in an elementary school in Stamford, Connecticut, I am faced with not only a wide range of mental health issues with children and families, but with safety concerns within the school building as well.

In relation to mental health, there have been students in my building who displayed such significant psychiatric behaviors that 2-1-1 had to be called, and the child was immediately hospitalized for emergency psychiatric services. Although 2-1-1 can be dialed by anyone, it is particularly the school social workers who are educated in mental health, and recognize the psychotic breaks that could easily lead to severe safety issues on all levels, and make the call. In relation to safety, I have developed and presented numerous age-appropriate assemblies and class discussions relating to school safety, responsibility, and bullying. In the counseling setting, often times children express how uncomfortable they feel talking to their teachers because there either isn't enough time in the day, or they're afraid their peers will hear them and call them a "snitch". Teachers, quite frankly, do not have the time to sit and listen to their students concerns that do not relate to the reading or math lessons. Parents often find that school social workers are an added support to not only their children, but to themselves as well. School social workers have unpredictable days, often ready for the challenge – whatever the crisis may be. We went to school to "help people", but we share awareness, advocacy, crisis management, and true compassion to all students, staff, and families.

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