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Testimony to the Legislature's Special Committee on School Safety

**How School Social Workers can assist with mental health issues, school violence and assist in making the school environment a safer place for the well-being of all Children and Youth.**

My name is Winston B. Johnson, ACSW, LCSW and I am the Director of Prevention/Intervention Services for the Hartford Public Schools. I'm a product of the Hartford Public Schools, born and raised in the Hartford Community. I was the Rehabilitation Coordinator for Catholic Family Services' Correction Program for 6 years working to assist young men and women in the correctional facilities transition back to community life in Hartford. I have worked for the Hartford Public Schools for 33 years in a variety of positions, as a school social worker in the middle schools, Assistant Coordinator of Social Work Services, Vice Principal, Coordinator of Social Work Services, Acting Principal, Acting Coordinator of Alternative Education Program, Active Director of Adult Education, SPED Director, Director of Psychology and Social Work Services, and Director of Prevention/Intervention providing supervision and oversight for the 48 Schools Social Worker in the Hartford Public Schools. In addition to providing supervision to our school social workers I also provide support and consultation to all of our Prevention Intervention Teams (crisis teams) District Wide, and maintain the Suicide Ideations records and mandated reports (136 reports for Child abuse) as well as provide Professional Development for all of our Support Services Staff District Wide. I am on a number of community boards and community teams responsible for providing services and support for children and families in the Greater Hartford Community. I participated on the Connecticut Commission on Healthy Equity – Roundtable discussion on Narrowing the Achievement Gap by Improving the Health of Our students May 8, 2012 at 3:00 PM Legislative Office Building, Rm 1C, Dr. Marie Spivey, Chair of the Connecticut Commission on Health Equity. I also participated on The Connecticut State Dept. of Education Informational forum on Statewide School Attendance Policies: Monday June 4, 2012 at 9:00 AM to Noon at Legislative Office Building, Rm 2E – Dr. Charlene Russell-Tucker, SDE Chaired the Forum. I have shared this background with you in an effort to inform you of my long term commitment and concern for the children and youth and their well-being in not only the Hartford Public Schools but in all of our schools throughout the State of Connecticut.

The School Social Workers evaluate diagnoses and provides services to those students who are experiencing social and emotional difficulties, which hinder their learning and/or school adjustment. Direct services are provided to identified students and their families include casework, group work, family counseling, social work assessment, crisis intervention, and referrals to a wide range of community based services. The school social worker also serves as a mental health consultant to teachers, counselors and administrators; counsels parents to facilitate involvement and communication with the school; serves as a liaison to social, legal, health and welfare agencies; facilitates and coordinates the referral of students for psychiatric evaluations; coordinates and monitors referrals to Superior Court for Juvenile Matters under "Family with Service Needs" and Truancy Legislation; participates as a member of the SST and PPT process and provides developmental and social histories in accordance with Connecticut Statute 10-76d-9 and Public Law 94-142. In collaboration with UCONN School of Social Work, the Department provides training for Graduate Interns.

I believe that early intervention and mental health services in our public schools require the attention of all to help create a safe and orderly environment for all of our children. One way to do this is to increase the number of School Social Worker to a minimum of at least one full time School Social Worker in every schools and improve the ratio of student to social worker to SSW at least 1:250 state wide. Aside from the school

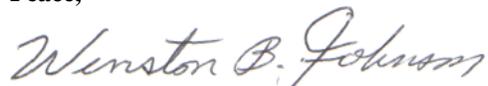
principals, SSW are the first line of support for student experiencing emotional stress, trauma, and school disconnect school staff.

Why an increase in School workers is Critical to the Well Being of our children in the schools?

1. School Social Workers (SSW) have considerable knowledge about education and how to complement and strengthen education programs by assisting to provide a continuum of developmental, preventive, remedial and support services-factors which contribute to the cost effectiveness for their services.
2. As school employees, SSW understands the culture of the school systems, how they operate, how they communicate.
3. SSW are readily available to participate in staff conferences related to students behavior, adjustment and academic progress with a focus on early intervention/prevention efforts.
4. SSW are readily available to consult with teachers and other pupil services personnel about students' living situations and neighborhood circumstances and their impact on student learning.
5. SSW are readily available to collaborate with teachers and other staff in assessing student needs and devising strategies to help individual students.
6. SSW are readily available to assist administrators in discipline hearing, juvenile just matters and communication with Community Base Services Providers regarding the mental health needs and family interventions.
7. SSW are readily available to serve on policy-making committees and boards. They assist school personnel to develop and implement policies and procedures regarding the reporting of child abuse, youth suicide prevention, truancy prevention, and community school base crisis response.
8. SSW are readily available to participate in the development of alternative education program.
9. SSW are readily available to contribute to staff development programs. They are particularly helpful in assisting teachers to integrate mental health concepts in the classroom.
10. When designated as special education personnel, SSW entitle the district to Medicaid reimbursement because of the SDE Certification and licensures.

There is no question but that SSW provide valuable counseling services, prevention intervention responses among others, to students and their families. However, the SSW ability to serve as an active member of a multidisciplinary school based team the provide leadership and support to helping to improve the school environment and the need for more SSW has never been more critical. We ask that you assist us in helping to insure that every school has at least one full time SSW in every school to assist with improving the quality of mental health service, helping to create a safe and orderly school environment for all of our children and youth in the state of Connecticut.

Thanks you for your consideration,  
Peace,



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Director of Prevention Intervention

