

**Testimony of Paula Kotara
High School Counselor &
Government Relations & Advocacy Committee Member,
Connecticut School Counselor Association**

in regards to

**H.B. No. 5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING
JUNE 30, 2021.**

Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education
Public Hearing - February 13, 2020

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee – my name is Paula Kotara and I am a local Connecticut high school counselor and a member of the Government Relations and Advocacy Committee for the Connecticut School Counselor Association. Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts in regards to **H.B. No. 5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021.**

The Connecticut School Counselor Association (CSCA) is the professional organization representing the state's more than 1400 school counselors, while promoting leadership and advancing the professional school counseling identity. We are a charter division of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) which provides us with current and relevant information to enhance our skill level and professionalism.

As a member of CSCA, and as a first-year high school counselor, I strongly believe in the need for our state to provide all of our students K-12 with access to a school counselor. Unfortunately, at this time, this is not the case. In fact, less than 25% of our students have access to an elementary school counselor. In addition to this, because of the high caseloads within the state – which are, on average, 1 school counselor per 466 students) – students at the middle school and high school levels also do not always have access to their school counselor. This is problematic because it then means that students throughout Connecticut are not receiving equitable comprehensive school counseling services that foster academic, social/emotional, and career development of all students – a notion that we abide by as professionals in our field.

School counselors at the elementary, middle, and high school level are all trained to identify gaps that our students have through data collection and analysis. After determining these gaps and needs, school counselors provide Tier I support through classroom lessons, Tier II support through small group instruction/counseling, and Tier III support through individual counseling. Our multifaceted approach allows us to provide services to students that address not only their academic needs, but also their career development and social/emotional developmental needs. By addressing all three areas of student development, school counselors work to build more competent, confident, and well-adjusted youth that will lead meaningful and purposeful lives in their post-secondary journeys.

With the ever-changing landscape of the world we live in, the role of the school counselor is becoming increasingly vital to the educational field as a whole. This is why we strongly believe in the need for school counselors across all levels of education – elementary, middle, and high school. By increasing the number of school counselors at the elementary level, Connecticut can begin to take more of a proactive and preventative approach, rather than reactive. This, in turn, will allow us to address some of our youth's obstacles at the root of the problem. As a member of this profession, and as an individual who sees first hand just how important this role is to Connecticut's educational system, I hope to see an increase in school counselors state-wide, so that we can continue to help produce well-rounded and active members of society.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Paula Kotara
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