



Connecticut School Counselor Association

A Chartered Division of the American School Counselors Association

**Testimony of Virginia A. DeLong
School Counselor, Lebanon Middle School
Government Relations & Advocacy Chairman
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 respected members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Virginia DeLong and I am a school counselor and Chairman of the Government Relations and Advocacy Committee for the CT School Counselor Association. I am grateful for the opportunity to share 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.

There is a drastic need in our state to provide all of our students K-12 with access to a school counselor. Unfortunately, at this time, all of our students do not have access with less than 25% of our students actually having access to an elementary school counselor. In addition to this, because of the high caseloads within the state (1:466), 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 our students throughout Connecticut are not receiving equitable comprehensive school counseling services. These services include academic support, career advising and social emotional supports.

School counselors at all three levels are trained to identify gaps that our students have through data collection and analysis. After identifying where the needs are, school counselors use that information to develop classroom lessons that are delivered to all students at the Tier I level, develop small group curriculum for students at the Tier II level of need, and where necessary provide Tier III instruction to students who may need more 1:1 attention over a short-term period of time.

We work to support students academically, collaborating with staff to determine what services need to be provided to meet the needs of the students and to help them to be academically successful. Starting very early on in elementary school, school counselors provide lessons in the academic and social emotional domains, but also start working with students on career development, which is instrumental in helping students to develop career paths that are best suited for them and that can also help workforce development within Connecticut. Counselors also are spending more and more time meeting the social emotional needs of our students. According to a recent report put out by the Center for Disease Controls (CDC), the rate of suicide is up 76% over the last decade within the 10-24 year old age group. We are seeing a great increase in anxiety and depression diagnosis with our students, as well as a rise in special education referrals.



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School counselors are trained to recognize mental health concerns with our students, provide short term counseling and regular check-ins with students who need it, and to work to provide preventative services within the classroom to all students. School counselors are vital to the ever changing landscape of education.

We need more school counselors in all of our schools across Connecticut. We need them in not only our middle and high schools, but our elementary schools as well. If we can start being more proactive and preventative rather than reactive with the needs of our students, we believe that Connecticut will save a great deal of money over time in education costs. We continue to bandaid problems within education, rather than trying to get to the root of the problem and do what is necessary to make long term lasting solutions to helping all of our kids to be more successful.

However, despite the importance of the work that we do with students in our schools as, when it comes time for districts to determine where cuts are going to be made, school counselors are often on the top of the list as the first to be cut, which often then results in an increase in student to counselor ratios and a reduction in services.

As an association, we are happy to work with the Appropriations Committee, the Education Committee and anyone else on ways to provide long term funding for the addition of school counselors in our schools. We have a few ideas of how we believe this can happen and would welcome any further discussion around this.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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