



**Testimony of Heather Casale
School Counselor, Coventry High School**

in support of

**S.B. N.o. 6439 312 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE
THIRTEENTH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR**

Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education Public Hearing - March 9, 2021

**Governor's Proposed FY 2022-2023 Budget for
Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies**

Senator Osten & Representative Walker, my name is Heather Casale and I am a School Counselor in Coventry, CT and serve as the Regional Vice President for the Windham/Tolland County for the Connecticut School Counselors Association (CSCA). Thank you for the opportunity to offer **testimony in strong support of Senate Bill NO. 6439 an act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirteenth, 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefore.**

The Connecticut School Counselor Association (CSCA) is the professional organization that represents Connecticut's school counselors across the state. There are over 1200 school counselors we serve as an association. We promote leadership and work to help promote the professional identity of school counselors. CSCA is the charter division of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) which provides us with current and relevant information to enhance our skills and professionalism.

It is imperative for all students k-12 to have access to a school counselor. This need for school counselors have always been present within the school building. This need is only increasing in demand with the onset of pandemic COVID-19. The social emotional needs of our students and children is on the rise. Now more than ever school counselors are needed to service our students. Prior to the pandemic many schools lacked the resources and school counselors needed to be able to provide adequate services. Less than 25% of the state's students have access to an elementary school counselor. **Connecticut ranks 27th in the United States with a ratio of 1:457** (counselor to student ratio). This ratio is extremely high, creating a wide variation of services being provided to our youth. Some urban areas have ratios much higher than this average. This raises concern as our students throughout the state are not having access to equitable comprehensive school counseling programs that include academic support, career and post secondary advising, and the critical social emotional support.

School counselors are trained professionals skilled in providing preventative services within the academic, career, and social emotional domains to all students within a school. We work through a tiered intervention program. Through this model we are able to determine and address





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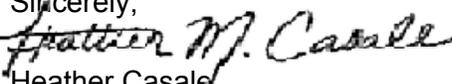
each student's individual needs. However without appropriate staffing and ratios these models are not able to function properly, ultimately creating a higher demand than what can be accommodated. In the recent months demands and needs have increased even further.

As a school counselor the work that I do with my students is crucial in their academic, personal and post-secondary successes. I work with my students to develop life skills for in and out of the classroom. Such things like time management, prioritization and coping strategies to deal with stress. I am fortunate to be in a school where our ratios are lower than most, 1:180. This allows for time to plan and implement our comprehensive counseling curriculum. However even with the lowercase numbers we are being pulled for study hall coverage, lunch duty and other supervisory tasks to help fill gaps while in the pandemic. We are barely able to make it work due to Covid-19 and increased demand. I truly couldn't imagine having over 300 students, maintaining building responsibilities and effectively working with the students.

Even though it is well known the importance of school counselors in the school building, these are often the first positions to be cut from budgets when skimming is needed. This is one of the factors contributing to high ratios and caseload numbers. This is when the reduction of students' services begins to appear. We need to secure a more direct form of funding specifically for the hiring and school counselors, social workers and school psychologists. If we want our students to do well they must in turn be well. We want our students to return to the school buildings, for this to happen they need to feel safe and supported.

I would ask that you please consider this bill to help increase funding for additional school counselors in our state to help grant access to support services for all students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Heather Casale
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