



Connecticut School Counselor Association

A Chartered Division of the American School Counselors Association

Testimony of Curtis Darragh IV
School Counselor, Westside Middle School Academy, Danbury Public Schools
Connecticut School Counselor Association
Middle School Level Liaison
Government Relations and Advocacy Member

in regards to

H.B. No. 6439 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

Appropriations Committee

Public Hearing – March 9th, 2021

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and respected members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Curtis Darragh IV and I am a school counselor in the Danbury Public Schools, the CT School Counselor Association Middle level Liaison and an active member of the Government Relations and Advocacy Committee. I am grateful for the opportunity to share in regards to **H.B. No. 6439 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

The Connecticut School Counselor Association (CSCA) is the professional organization representing the state's more than 1200 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 an extreme need in our state to provide all of our students K-12 with access to a school counselor. Sadly, 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 (1:457), students at the middle school and high school levels also do not always have access to their school counselor. This is challenging 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.

The effects the covid-19 pandemic has had on our students academically, mentally, and emotionally in Connecticut is concerning and provides me with some apprehension about how we are going to address these concerns in our schools at a wider scale. Families need electricity, food, shelter, internet, etc. We cannot expect our students to take care of academics if these needs are not met. In Danbury and I'm sure in other cities across CT, our populations (general, SPED, ESL, 504, etc) struggled when it came to academics, and most of these families are working two sometimes three jobs keep ends meet. Along with these struggles, counselors have an seen an increase in mental health diagnoses such as anxiety and depression within the past year. The need for more school counselors, with appropriate ratios, (recommended 250:1) not only in our district but in our state is needed now more than ever.

School counselors in K-12 are trained to identify gaps for our students through data collection and analysis. We identify where the needs are and through tier I, develop classroom lessons that is delivered to all students. We can create tier II level of need for those students who benefit from small group



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instruction and if necessary provide tier III instruction to students who may need more than 1:1 attention over a short period of time.

School counselors play as a “link” to all students, parents, administrators, teachers, stakeholders and other services to determine what the needs are for our students. If we were to start early in elementary school, school counselors can provide lessons in the academic and social emotional domains, but also start with introducing students on career development. Whether that be college, the trades, or the military, school counselors can bring the best in every child that walks through those halls. 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.

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 global world of education.

School counselors are needed now more than ever in the state of Connecticut. We need more of them in our high schools, middle schools and even our elementary schools. Connecticut needs to reshape the way we handle the growing needs of our children in this state. We need to start thinking of the future and the long-term effects school counselors can make in children, because the covid-19 pandemic will have lingering effects on our students and their families, and they are the ones that matter when it comes to this topic. What are we going to do for them? The CSCA has developed a framework that has been adopted by the CSDE. Now, school districts need to start implementing it and paving the road for what school counselors can do for their schools.

I come here representing and speaking for our middle school population, on behalf of CSCA and on behalf of Danbury. I am 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. CSCA has 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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