



**Testimony of Virginia A. DeLong
Government Relations & Advocacy Chairman
Connecticut School Counselor Association**

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

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

State Department of Education/School Counseling Funding

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and respected members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Virginia DeLong and I am a Director of School Counseling 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. 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 a drastic need in our state to provide all of our students K-12 with access to a school counselor. The Covid-19 Pandemic has exacerbated this need as we continue to see a rise in the social emotional needs of our students. Prior to the pandemic all of our students in CT did not have access to a school counselor and that is even more evident as school student support services staff struggle to meet all of the social emotional needs of students. Less than 25% of our students have access to an elementary school counselor. CT now ranks **37th** in the country with an average school counselor to student ratio of **1:457**. With ratios this high, and in some cases even higher in our urban areas, middle school and high school students are also unable to 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 that include academic support, career advising and especially social emotional support.***

School counselors are trained to provide preventative services within the academic, career, and social emotional domains to ALL students within a school. We are able to work with students through the State's tiered intervention model making sure that student needs are addressed. The State Department of Education has spent thousands of dollars on a social emotional screener for districts to use so that we can be sure to identify all of our students with social emotional needs, however, with school counselor ratios already high and school counselors unable to meet the



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current demand, we may end up with a lot of students with need and a lack of resources to address that need.

Governor Lamont, also has a plan to increase the FAFSA rates in the state, increase access and provide guaranteed enrollment into work based learning, dual-enrollment, advanced placement, ECE and IB programs, as well as automatic admissions into our Connecticut State Universities. The success of many of these programs means that schools need to have adequate school counseling staff to address all of these areas for all students. Right now, not all students even have access to a school counselor.

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. We are instrumental in bridging support between schools and outside counseling, often being the first line of defense before an outside referral is made. 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, when it comes time for districts to determine where cuts are going to be made, school counselors are often first on the chopping block, which often then results in an increase in student to counselor ratios and a reduction in services. We need more direct funding specifically for the hiring of school counselors, social workers and school psychologists. If we want our kids back in school and we want them to be successful we need to also provide the support services that they need.

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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