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Testimony of Kathryn Goldberg
Associate Director of College & Career Counseling, Achievement First Amistad High School
in support of
H.B. 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 Kathryn Goldberg and I am a school counselor in New Haven and a member of the Connecticut School Counselor Association. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in **support of H.B. 6439 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

During the 2018-2019 school year, I had the privilege to serve as a school counseling practicum student (intern) at Truman School, a K-8 school in New Haven. The district made a decision the previous summer that school counselor roles would be cut across the district, but that they would maintain a 250:1 student to counselor ratio for students in grades 5-8. However, as any New Haven resident will tell you, New Haven Public Elementary and Middle Schools are almost uniformly K-8 buildings. So while 1 counselor per building was within the recommended caseload ratio for grades 5-8, it left students in grades K-4 technically without access to a school counselor. However, because the counselor I worked with was keenly aware of the needs of her students and teachers, she worked tirelessly to serve all 565 students in the building. It is unfathomable as an educator to walk past a child in the hall or in a classroom who is crying, fighting or otherwise struggling. While students who externalized their trauma through yelling, fighting or acting out certainly caught our staff's attention, I was most worried about those students who internalized their traumas, hiding away their feelings, disengaging and disconnecting from their peers and teachers. With such large caseloads, it was so hard to make time and space for those students who had clear needs, but were not making "the most noise." This school counselor at Truman did the right thing and worked tirelessly, coming to school an hour before other staff, staying late into the afternoon in order to meet the needs of all students in her school building, and bringing work home in the evenings in order to take care of paperwork and necessary documentation so it would not take away the precious hours of the day when she could provide direct service to the students of Truman School. Together we worked to provide bi-monthly classroom guidance lessons to students in grades K-4, because we knew the proactive and preventative nature of these lessons would pay dividends in these children's future lives. While these circumstances are unfortunate, it was an honor to serve and learn alongside a school counselor who knew the needs of their students and worked to their fullest to provide all students in the building the education they deserve.

I am now a school counselor at Achievement First Amistad High School in New Haven, serving students in grades 9-12 from New Haven and Bridgeport. In my current role as Associate Director of College and Career Counseling, our team of 4 counselors provides post-secondary planning services for 151 students each year. There are additional school counselors and social workers in our building who provide services

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specifically for the social-emotional and mental health needs of our students. The significantly smaller caseload size this arrangement provides feels like a luxury in comparison to the ratios I know exist in our other New Haven Public High Schools. I believe these small caseload sizes is what has allowed our school to send more than 85% of our graduates to a 2 or 4 year college for the past 10 years. The majority of our students are low-income students of color who will be the first in their family to attend college. The learning curve of admissions and financial aid processes is steep, and the work is endlessly bureaucratic. My students apply to 8 to 12 colleges, which translates into needing to write 15-25 essays, and the need to submit the FAFSA two separate times. School counselors can play a vital role in supporting student writing and providing motivation and encouragement when students are stymied by the bureaucracy. Data this year analyzed by the Washington Post found that African-American and Latinx students are selected for financial aid verification at rates 1.8 and 1.4 times more than White students, respectively. Without someone to walk the first-generation college student and family through the importance of these forms or supporting them to submit it accurately, they would not receive the financial aid that allows them to attend college. I firmly believe that additional funding for school counseling would allow us to meet the baseline social-emotional needs of our state's children *and* make significant progress in college-going rates.

All of my previous testimony is based on my 9 years of experience before the COVID-19 pandemic, and yet because of the pandemic, this year often feels like my first year as a school counselor. The social-emotional and mental health needs of our students in New Haven and Bridgeport have astronomically increased as a result of the trauma related to the loss of life and loss of economic security due to COVID-19 and its disproportionate impact on Black and Latinx communities in Connecticut. Simultaneously compounding this trauma is the increased gun violence that has spiked since the pandemic began. When the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years begin, our students will re-enter our communities with scars and pain that we have not yet begun to scratch the surface in understanding. To meet the yet unknown needs, additional funding will surely be necessary.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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