

Testimony of Margaret Mocny
School Counseling Graduate Student - Central Connecticut State University
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 Committee -March 9, 2021 - via Zoom

Senator Osten, Representative Walker and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Margaret Mocny and I am a graduate student from Central Connecticut State University and a current school counseling intern at Woodrow Wilson Middle School in Middletown, CT. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in regards to **AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

As a school counseling intern that has consistently pushed to stay open and support their students, I witnessed first hand the need for more school counselors in our districts. During my time in Middletown as a practicum student at the high school and an intern at the middle school, I have watched all of the amazing counselors take on new challenges each day to ensure we are reaching out and supporting as many students in the most effective ways possible. I have witnessed countless inspiring things these counselors do on a day to day basis, while simultaneously seeing how spread thin they can be. As schools are becoming more populated, the student to school counselor ratio has become skewed in the wrong direction.

Oftentimes, school counselors are forced to prioritize students differently, which can negatively impact the work they do with all of their students. If school counselors have higher ratios, like the average from 2018-2019 of 1:457, they are not reaching all of the students they must to ensure each student's needs are being met. Counselors are implementing creative techniques to ensure they can even get to meet with their students the amount of times the district requires, but this does not change the fact that there are significantly more students than there are counselors. To ensure we are meeting each student's needs, we must have more school counselors available to the students.

In many schools, students go too long in their school without even knowing their school counselor exists, because the student to counselor ratio is terribly skewed in the wrong direction. School counselors are in our schools to help students with social emotional learning, facilitate small groups for focused purposes, and to collaborate with teachers, support staff, administration, parents and guardians on better ways to help each student. When counselors are given larger case loads, they must reconsider how they prioritize students and their concerns. This challenge continues to take up a fair amount of their time as they are consistently working to find the most effective solutions for their students.

In a time of consistent trauma and repair, our students need every support they can get during the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools typically have the appropriate support in place, but never have the hands to ensure the amount of work is being done correctly. When I look at my own work in the last few months, I have seen the struggles students are going through first hand and it makes it challenging to know that those are the students I have been able to see. Yet there are absolutely more that are still struggling and they do not have the resources, because there are not enough school counselors. In many elementary schools, there are not any school counselors. Less than 25% of Connecticut elementary schools have school counselors and typically, these counselors are working in several schools in the district. This leaves a lot of schools without the essential support of a school counselor at all times.

I ask that the committee considers allocating funds to schools specifically to fund the hiring and employment of more school counselors because school counselors are essential to each student. Each student deserves to have the support of another adult in their school that is there to help, encourage, support and inspire them. Each student deserves the attention needed to learn, grow, change, and

develop. If we put the children's needs aside, we lose these students and they lose trust in us. If we do not work to change things now, there will only be other damage done later. As school counselors, we don't just make your kids schedules, provide a safe space, or call when grades are falling, we work every day to ensure our students know they are in a safe learning space, supported by a staff who cares about them, that they have the appropriate resources to succeed and that they are not a number, but a person to their school counselor. School counselors care wholeheartedly about their students, but are wedged in a corner when trying to give their best care to all students, when our ratios are skewed. If more school counselors are hired, people across the state will begin to see the extraordinary work that school counselors do each day to help their students succeed.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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