



## Connecticut School Counselor Association

A Chartered Division of the American School Counselors Association

Testimony of Kaitlin Smedberg

School Counselor; Treasurer of the CT School Counselor Association

*in support of*

**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 Kaitlin Smedberg and I am a school counselor in West Hartford and the treasurer of the Connecticut 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.

Research shows that **implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program has a positive impact on student outcomes including improved attendance, reduced discipline, improved grades, increased SAT scores, increased graduation rates, increased college-going and persistence rates** While part of our duty as a school counselor is to address issues when they arise, a primary focus is to work proactively to identify certain needs year to year through needs assessments, surveys, and data from previous school years to plan our programming. School Counselors, working within a comprehensive school counseling program, provide education, prevention, early identification, and intervention to help their students achieve academic success, develop an understanding of career opportunities, and develop social-emotional skills in response to the issues they face. We work to not only identify but intervene as soon as we can to remove barriers to learning and educational success for each of our students. The goal is to provide these interventions as soon as possible, however student access to school counseling is not consistent across the state.

Currently, **fewer than 25% of Connecticut's elementary school children have access to school counselors** and comprehensive school counseling programming; that means that 75% of students are not receiving the attention, care, and proactive interventions of a school counselor and a comprehensive school counseling program. In addition to this, **Connecticut ranks 37th in the nation for average school counselor to student ratios.** Due to these high caseloads (an average of 1:457), students at the middle school and high school levels also do not always have access to their school counselor. This is problematic because it means students throughout Connecticut are not receiving equitable comprehensive school counseling services including



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academic support, career advising, and social emotional support, especially during such a crucial time when mental health needs are at an all-time high.

This year, all of our students have been impacted by COVID-19. We have been in a hybrid learning model all year, with many students not coming to school at all due to concerns about COVID-19, anxiety, or other mental health issues that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Most of our days are spent not only delivering our school counseling curriculum, but addressing the increasing mental health needs of our students and working with stakeholders to figure out creative ways for students to find success. With appropriate ratios of at LEAST 250 students per school counselor, we can begin to make an impact for *all* of our students, since that is our job. We don't just serve a portion of our caseload, we work to serve all students. While the recommendation is 1:250, that should be seen as the *maximum* ratio. At a previous position I had a caseload of 1:100 and honestly, it was still too high. The mental health needs of the students were so great, and the outside factors impacting each student's physical and mental well-being were so powerful, that servicing all 100 students was challenging. The ratio must be relative to the needs of the student population in the school and community, it is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

If there's any silver lining to the pandemic and the increasing mental health needs of our students, it is an increased awareness of mental health and the utmost importance it has on student success. I hope that we can find ways to provide long term funding for the addition of school counselors in our schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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