

**Testimony of**

**Tom Nicholas**

Before the

**Education Committee**

**Re: SB 312 AA Concerning School Counselors**

March 6, 2020

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Tom Nicholas, and I am a school social worker who also serves as Vice President of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA), an organization representing active and retired teachers from over 150 school districts across Connecticut.

CEA supports the intent of SB 312; however, we believe it does not go far enough to address the impact on children caused by too few school counselors who are being asked to take on responsibilities outside of their role.

SB 312 would ensure that school counselors spend 80% of their time providing school counseling services, rather than being redeployed to cover other school needs unrelated to counseling. We believe that this is a good first step. We also believe that the wording could more clearly address the many responsibilities school counselors are asked to take on, particularly responsibilities within the remaining 20% of their time that may be outside of their defined role. CEA supports the Connecticut School Counselor Association on this provision. They seek to delete the words ***“directly to individual or groups of students”*** and I further refer you to their testimony today for greater detail.

We also believe that student-to-counselor ratios are far too high. Demand for services from school counselors, who are instrumental in children’s educational development throughout their school years, is outpacing supply. In fact, a recent ACLU publication shows the average student-to-counselor ratio in Connecticut to be a staggering 326:1. This far exceeds the 250:1 ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association. Many elementary schools do not have a counselor assigned. At the same time, 38,906 Connecticut students currently attend a school that has a security guard but no counselor.

Our members, Connecticut educators, are increasingly concerned about the availability of services for all students, especially those who exhibit the greatest level of need. A growing concern is the availability of social-emotional support for children, including those in the earliest grades, who have experienced trauma or other challenges that impact their ability to learn and develop on pace with their peers.

Connecticut teachers believe that it is time for legislators to boldly address student trauma by, among other strategies, funding school districts to hire more school counselors and other certified student support staff.

Thank you.