

Testimony of

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Before the

Public Health Committee & Committee on Children

Re:

HB 5001 - AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

February 25, 2022

Good morning members of the Public Health Committee and Committee on Children. Thank you for holding this public hearing to discuss mental health supports for our students. I support the many provisions in HB 5001 and SB 2 that address the student mental health crisis in our schools, especially those relating to staffing support and ensuring classroom teachers have greater input in resources available to students in crisis.

The proposed legislation enhances the recruitment and staffing of social workers but, for the sake of our students, I want to ensure that these provisions will also apply to school counselors, psychologists, special educators, and other certified specialists.

What You Don't See, but as an educator, I see every day, is the impact that trauma has on my students and my school.

I teach 3rd grade with a class of 14 students this year. Although it is a small class, there are several demanding and disruptive behaviors that interrupt the learning process for all. Today, I had 3 separate students act out. One student with recent outside diagnosis of severe anxiety and a mood disorder threw a marker at my head, hit my hand, yell, and refuse all tasks. Another student tipped his desk, poured his water bottle on the floor, hid under a table for an hour, making loud noises, and refusal to leave the classroom to go to Special because another student told him to "Please stop making the noise" and because he does not like reading books without pictures. The third one got upset and ran out the door after slamming it and hid in his locker. Those are three but there are others with needs in my classroom. Three students can only read at a beginning Kindergarten level. There is truly only one well-adjusted, academically strong student in my class this year. Others with severe ADHD and anxiety. Unfortunately, there are very few people to call when these instances are going on. Our Social Worker and School Psychologist are constantly being called, and we have one principal who helps when he is not in meetings. School counselors would be a great answer to this and fit just what we need as the role of School counselor has shifted greatly. Hiring well-qualified paraprofessionals or behaviorists would be another way to support us. Our district is struggling to find paraprofessionals to work as most of ours can only be hired part-time with no benefits. I am feeling very overwhelmed and discouraged. I have been teaching for 22 years and the decline in mental health has been hurting us all.

Thank you for addressing these critical issues impacting our students, our educators, and our school communities.