

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.

When I started my job in CT 10 year ago, I thought I would never last. And that was before Covid. At that time, I went from being the "new social worker" to the person in charge due to Administration turn over. I was running EIP meetings, I was the PBIS coach, I was the School Climate Coordinator, I was the Parent Engagement Specialist, I was doing the morning announcements, bullying investigations...the list was endless. I learned the paperwork as I went. I worked all the time.

Again, that was pre-Covid. What you don't see now is that the student needs are more than we are equipped for. We carry walkie-talkies. We manage extremely difficult behaviors resulting in restraints and seclusions. We put out fires all day long. We write behavior plans, IEP goals and do monthly Medicaid billing. All while trying to be engaged and available to countless students experiencing anxiety, depression, ADHD, eating disorders, etc. Families are reaching out for help and there is nowhere to send them. Agencies are full, hospitals are full. Our caseloads are unmanageable.

I leave each day knowing I did the very best I could but that it isn't nearly enough. There are so many students that need support and there is not enough of our time to go around. And I don't think we've even seen the tip of the iceberg yet. I think the needs of the Generation Alpha remain underestimated at this time.

Schools absolutely need more support from social workers. I am clinically trained (LCSW) to manage the situations that come my way all day long, I just need support in doing so.

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