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Testimony of

Donald Williams

Connecticut Education Association

Before a joint meeting of the

Public Health Committee

&

Committee on Children

Re:

HB 5001 AAC CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH
SB 2 EXPANDING PRESCHOOL AND MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

February 25, 2022

Good afternoon, members of the Children's and Public Health Committees. My name is Don Williams, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Education Association. CEA represents educators in more than 150 school districts in Connecticut.

I am testifying in support of House Bill 5001, and Senate Bill 2, concerning mental health and emotional support for students in our schools.

We are now in the third school-year of the pandemic, and COVID has highlighted a mental health pandemic. Students, educators and parents have experienced stress, trauma, and disruption. Social and emotional needs are greater than ever.

We need the resources not only to recognize trauma and mental health needs in our schools, but also to address those needs, and build pathways forward.

A recent study by the Rand Corporation, completed last December, reports that nationwide, school leaders' top three concerns are the mental health of students, teachers, and principals, respectively.

The study also found that 60% of school leaders reported that as a result of stress and disruption, the need for assistance in self-regulation has become a moderate to major concern.

In order to meet our students' mental health needs and trauma, Connecticut must invest in solutions.

CEA and many other stakeholders are advocating for specific supports in our schools. We want to ensure that students have sufficient access to social workers, counselors, school psychologists, and para-

professionals, and lower student-to-teacher-ratios. Those proven supports are lacking in too many school districts.

As Melissa Schlinger of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, said:

“We already know a lot about how to reverse the impact of trauma, and to promote healing... We need to provide consistent, supportive relationships, nurturing environments, and opportunities to develop social and emotional skills. When every student feels valued and accepted... we’re more likely to spot needs early on...”

This legislative session, we must invest in the staff and resources necessary to address student trauma and mental health—it’s critical to improving our children’s and our state’s future.

Thank you.