

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.

On a daily basis, we have unregulated K-4 students attacking, hitting, and verbally abusing staff and students, as well as destroying classrooms and hallways. Many of our general education students are targeted victims of these behaviors. Because these students are main-streamed into our classrooms, their behaviors are detrimental to the safety and academic growth of the general student population. Teachers are required to keep these students in their classrooms despite a history of episodes of violence and dysregulation. When these instances occur, teachers need to remove the entire class from the classroom; leaving behind their instructional materials in order to relocate to a safer space. Upon return, the classrooms have been completely trashed- bookcases dumped, computers smashed, furniture turned upside down, academic work and bulletin boards destroyed. These interruptions are disrupting our students from learning and creating additional traumas from what they see and hear.

Just last week, a student scratched and punched another student (unprovoked) for wanting to be included in a peer activity, another second grade student punched a student in the face resulting in a black eye, and yet another second grader told a student they want to murder a tutor who was picking up another student for academic services. Last month, a pregnant first grade teacher was punched in the stomach and another unregulated student kicked a first grader in the stomach as she approached her desk to get her glasses. These physical aggressions are unprovoked and putting our children at risk.

The ideas and programs suggested to help support these students need to be put in place as soon as possible as well as getting parents involved and engaged in helping their child find the proper support. In addition, school social workers and counselors need to be proactively meeting with these students

daily to teach the social emotional skills required to function in a community instead of only responding to an event.

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