

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.

We have 1400 students from inner city neighborhoods that look like war zones. Many have witnessed or been victims of trauma like domestic violence in the home or have lost family members, loved ones and friends to the escalating violence that is perpetrated on their neighborhoods. In addition, there are almost 400 special education students in our school who need social emotional support in addition to the academic support already provided according to their IEPs. 2 social workers, who already have over 70 students on each of their caseloads and one psychologist who is the only one doing cognitive and behavioral assessments cannot possibly get all of this done in the timelines we are given. 500 annual review meetings, over 100 triennials to test for and to review records, write reports for and attend PPTs for in addition to the annuals and there is no time to do anything else. I cannot hold groups for social skill supports or grief and loss, or girl groups, boy groups or other supports for kids who are just needing some temporary support, as well as crisis intervention. We have lost two students to unexpected or violent circumstances this year alone and any number of students who have become gang-involved and some who are in jail or prison due to some of the things they've done. Where do I find the time to see students who need me when I have deadlines to meet for testing and holding meetings for testing review and annual reviews? How do I support those students who need to know that someone cares? I try to make connections at the testing table but that's not really the place for that, either. We need more people in these positions, more general behavioral support and better security (we currently have none). Where do we begin?

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