Sen. Handley, Rep. Sayers, Rep. Ritter, Sen. Slossberg and Members of the Public Health Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of S.B. No.1 and Proposed H.B. 6332. My name is JoAnn Eaccarino. I am the director of the 16 School Based Health Centers sponsored by Child & Family Agency. The schools in New London, Groton, and Norwich are in area designated by the federal government as Medically Underserved (MUA) and Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA). There is also a School Based Health Center at The Friendship School in Waterford where half of the children are residents of New London. Simply stated, the need for health services in these communities exceeds the capacity of the local provider community.

For the school children in these cities, and in many others across this State, the School Based Health Centers have responded to that need. Children who used to wait 3-6 weeks for an appointment with a community provider for a physical in order to enter school, are now given that physical at the School Based Health Center within one or two days, therefore not getting behind in their work even before they've begun. Children with both chronic and acute medical problems receive care in a setting that is familiar to them, while the provider has the opportunity to observe that child in their activities of daily living....in the classroom, on the playground with their friends (or lack thereof), in physical education, etc. Children who would be sitting on long waiting lists for a community mental health provider, not because of special education issues, but because their families are broken and they are having a hard time getting up in the morning and certainly not able to concentrate in school....they too are able to receive services in a timely manner if their school has a school based health center. Problems are identified earlier, care is instituted at a point where costs and level of care are minimized, follow-up is consistent, and in short, ACCESS is the key factor.

A recent study out of Denver found that the teen pregnancy rate among African American students was decreased just because there was a school based health center. This was not because they were providing birth control, but because they were THERE, on site, where they could go alone or with their friends, and get answers to their questions. It was the preventive, risk-reduction education that these teens received that resulted in this most important outcome.

I urge you to please support any of the bills before you that speak to the cost-effective, high quality services provided by School Based Health Centers. It is one of the best things you can give Connecticut's children.

Thank You.