

Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Committee. My name is Jesse White-Fresé, Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers.

The School Based Health Center model is a cost-effective, efficient delivery system of medical, mental health, and dental services to Connecticut's children. You understand the benefits of bringing health services to children in their schools, and have demonstrated that through your investment in School Based Health Centers. Currently, 19 Connecticut communities benefit from school-based services in more than 70 school sites. Annually, 44,000 children and adolescents utilize the services available in their School Based Health Centers in 131,000 visits. At least 28% of those students are uninsured, and the numbers are now climbing higher. The Governor's Public Health budget proposes to cut \$1.47 million from School Based Health Centers. This will have a devastating impact on Connecticut's children, potentially affecting nearly 7,000 students that will not have access to needed medical care.

School Based Health Centers are safety net providers for children and adolescents. By definition, a safety net provider maintains an "open door", offering access to patients regardless of their ability to pay. A substantial share of their patient mix is uninsured, Medicaid, and other vulnerable patients. This clearly describes the School Based Health Centers that you have funded. As families are experiencing the loss of employment and employer-sponsored health insurance, students are turning to the Centers for needed medical care and help with family stress. Parents are grateful that the Centers provide a safe environment for their children to express their concerns. Our military families tell us that when they are deployed their most important concern is that their children will receive the care they need while they are gone.

School Based Health Centers provide affordable health care. Students have immediate access to care provided by staff with expertise in child and adolescent health. When they receive care in the early stages of a medical or mental health problem, they avoid the costly care that results from delaying treatment. In most cases, the health care provided in the Centers keeps students in school and out of the emergency room. If School Based Health Center services are reduced, families will have no option but to seek care in the emergency

room for non-urgent issues, driving the cost of health care higher. As an example, a 2002 study by the Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers demonstrated that a visit to a school based health center for an asthma treatment cost ~\$22.00 compared to \$350.00 in the emergency department. The cost savings are clear. Numerous studies nationwide have shown that School Based Health Centers reduce inappropriate emergency room use, increase the use of primary care, and result in fewer hospitalizations among regular users.

School Based Health Centers keep children healthy and in school. Students that are healthy and attend school maximize their opportunities for learning. School Based Health Centers support schools and support families. During the economic downturn, families need the services provided in the Centers *more than ever*. We know that cuts to health care always impact vulnerable families. When family stress increases, we often see increases in substance abuse and domestic violence and the resulting impact on our children. In School Based Health Centers, reductions in funding translate into reductions in staffing, early closure of Centers, less days per week of service, and a loss of the health lifeline that is critical for so many children. The Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers strongly urges you not to cut this vitally important safety net for our most vulnerable young citizens. Thank you.

Testimony submitted by:

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Letter from a Windham High School Student that uses the Student Health Center

Dear Representative Geragosian,

Through word of mouth, I had heard that there was a plan to cut the budget of the Student Health Center in my high school, Windham High. When I checked the facts, I realized that this was indeed true. I feel obligated as a student to explain the importance of why the budget should not be cut a large amount.

During my career as a student I have been to a total of six schools. Some schools were within the same region, and some schools were in a different area in the state. However, I had never been to what was considered an 'inner city' school. I can say that my experience here at Windham High has been incredibly different from my other school experiences and what some would consider enlightening, due to the wide range of students with varying ethnicities, personalities, sexual orientations, and financial income. However, I cannot lie and say that everyone here is as ready and as eager to learn as the average teenager (who to be honest, aren't too over eager themselves.)

Many teenagers at this school are misguided. Not all of them are as good of students, or have the will to receive a good education as other schools with families with higher incomes. The majority of my school receives free or reduced lunch, and I am sure that you are aware that there is a nursery school in my high school as well. As a student with what I would hope to be considered a realistic approach; I cannot say that having a nursery school in a high school is completely acceptable. However, many teenage females at my school don't only call themselves students, they also call themselves mothers. In order to have their best interests in mind and encourage them to stay in school; we need to accommodate to their needs.

I believe that the Health Center at Windham High has helped immensely to those who have used the recourses here available to them. The students can go to get contraceptives, regular check ups, as well as STD tests available right in the school. It doesn't sound that glamorous until you have literally walked the halls in my school. The students here need to have a place to go to if they are feeling sick, and don't have the money to see a doctor. They need a place to talk about more serious issues, such as physical and even mental problems or struggles that they are going through. I strongly believe that the health center here is a tremendous source of help for these students. I sincerely feel as if that without the help of the Student Health Center, this school would be in a condition that no student should have to go through. When making your decision about the budget cuts, please keep this in mind. I understand that the economy is not the best right now and other things rank first in mind before my high school, but this school needs to be able to help kids when it seems like there is nobody else to help them.

Thank you for your time,

Marie Kelly
Student at Windham High School

