

**Testimony: Proposed Reductions to School Based Health Centers**

Good Evening. My name is Deborah Poerio and I am speaking on behalf of Integrated Health Services in response to the Governor's budget proposing a \$1,216,933 cut to the Dept. of Public Health's School Based Health Center Program. I implore you to consider the impact that this reduction will have on basic health services to the State's neediest children, and the rippling effect it would have on our economy through rising hospital costs and the additional burden on parents to take time off from work.

Despite the other stressors families are experiencing during these difficult economic times, parents have taken comfort in knowing that their child has access to quality health care at the SBHCs. Without access, parents would be forced to leave work and risk losing their jobs, only adding to the state's rising unemployment rate.

Last year, there were over 131,000 visits made by children to SBHCs around the state for physical, behavioral, or dental services. Between 60-75% of visits these (78-98,000) were made by children who were either uninsured or on Medicaid. If the proposed reduction to SBHCs is approved, a rippling effect would impact ER's as 25% of children seen at the SBHC would now end up in the ER. In the end, if a child makes only ONE visit to the ER, the increased burden to our hospitals would exceed \$7.8 million dollars. Ultimately, hospitals would be forced to request financial support from the state to remain solvent.

Additionally, emergency room physicians would agree that children's primary care illnesses would be better managed in a SBHC setting that ensures timely follow-up care, care coordination, and preventive education. For instance, an asthmatic child seen once in the ER would cost the same as 20 visits to the school based health center. However, after the 5th or 6th visit to the SBHC, the child's asthma would be well-managed and the need for further visits would be minimal, leading to huge cost savings to the state.

I know that you have tough decisions to make, however the legislature should view SBHCs as an investment and cost savings to the state rather than as an expense. The need for high quality, cost effective, and accessible care in this economy has only increased, and cutting the SBHCs would prove to be fiscally, and morally, unconscionable.

Please continue the wise investment that you have made in our SBHC programs over the years which has allowed us to have such a positive impact on the health of our children.