

Testimony of CT Association of School Based Health Centers, Inc.
Appropriations Committee

Thank you Senator Harp, Rep. Geragosian and members of the committee for allowing me to offer testimony on behalf of the CT Association of School Based Health Centers. My name is JoAnn Eaccarino and I am currently President of the Association and have worked in the School Based Health Center program in New London County for over 15 years. I am here to testify to the devastating effect that a \$1.2 million dollar cut would have on the school based health center program.

Connecticut's school based health centers have been delivering comprehensive health care to students in elementary, middle, and high schools for more than 25 years. Today, there are more than 75 centers in the state, serving over 44,000 students annually. The centers have become part of the essential system of care for children and adolescents, providing physical, behavioral, and oral health services, particularly in communities where children may not have easy access to health care. Most are located in priority school districts, helping to ensure that these children have the best opportunity to maximize their educational programs by keeping them physically and emotionally healthy. You have to be in school in order to learn! In a recent survey of 1,000 middle and high school students, 18% of them said that they would have gone home or stayed out of school if it wasn't for the health center.

We are concerned for the many children and their families without health insurance or real access to health care who depend on the school based health centers. Without these services, children will either not get the care they need until the health problem is more serious, and/or may end up in a hospital emergency room at a cost 10-15 times greater.

However, aside from the financial cost, I ask you to consider the human cost. A single mother of two offered this about the school based health center: "Without this program, my children and I would have become a statistic of the Department of Social Services. I would have been unable to continue working the hours I work. The state would not benefit from the taxes that I incur as a tax paying citizen and everyone would loose....especially the children. I work on average 60-70 hours per week and knowing that I no longer have to leave work to take my children home for a medical problem that can be treated at school is one of the best benefits of this program."

The proposed \$1.2 million dollar cut to school-based health center funding in the Governor's budget will result in loss of staff, reduced hours of operation, and diminished services at a time when families are facing loss of employment and insurance coverage and need the centers more than ever. I know that you have difficult decisions to make, and yet I ask you to make children's health a priority that will not be violated by this cut. Thank you.