



Testimony in Support of RB 5360, *An Act Concerning Children in the Recession*  
Connecticut Association of School Based Health Center, Inc.  
March 4, 2010

Good afternoon Representative Urban, Representative Jarmoc, and members of the Select Committee on Children. My name is Deborah Poerio, and I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers, a statewide organization that represents seventy-eight school based health centers in nineteen Connecticut communities. On behalf of the Association, I am providing testimony in support of Raised Bill 5360, *An Act Concerning Children in the Recession*

Connecticut has wisely invested in an accessible system of care to address the health care needs of children and adolescents through school based health centers. These 78 Centers provide comprehensive medical, mental health and dental services to 44,000 students annually in 131,000 visits. Students describe their school based health centers as a place where they feel safe and know that their health and emotional issues will be addressed. Families rely on these services so that parents can stay at work and their children can stay in school and continue to learn. For many families, the loss of employment, health insurance, transportation, and even their homes have placed great strain on both parents and their children. Incidents of family violence have increased as families struggle to survive. For these children, accessing care in their school based health center is more important than ever.

The cost effective services provided in SBHCs assure that children will receive the care they need to thrive. Over the last eighteen months, as the recession has deepened and unemployment has risen, SBHCs have had more demand for mental health services as students struggle to cope with family stress. In your report of the *Task Force on Children in the Recession*, you cite the long-term negative impact of family violence on children, and the critical importance of early intervention. School based health centers provide that early intervention that can reduce the long-term effects of violence on children, and often serve as the liaison between the family and the school to strengthen the child's support network.

In light of the effects of the current recession and the proven positive impact that school based health centers have on children's health, I would be remiss if I did not mentioned the proposed reductions to school based health centers in the Governor's deficit mitigation plan. In this fiscal year, SBHCs have already received a 5% reduction, and the Governor has proposed an additional \$1 million reduction before the close of *this* fiscal year. In addition, the FY 2011 budget proposes another \$1.23 million dollar reduction.

Your Task Force report clearly indicates that this is not the time to eliminate the easily accessible health care that our children receive in school based health centers. Our country mandates that every child has the right to an education-but not to health care? How do we justify reducing access to necessary health care services in school based health centers when we know families are struggling?

We applaud the fine work of the Task Force on Children in the Recession and stand ready to support your efforts. Thank you very much for the opportunity to submit this testimony. Please feel free to contact me or Jesse White-Frese, CASBHC Executive Director, for additional information.

Healthy Kids Make Better Learners