

Dear Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name Shawn Grunwald and I have coordinated the Windham School Based Health Center program for the past 19 years. We have two school based health centers located within the high school and the middle school.

I am in opposition to HB 6350, *An Act Concerning the Budget for the Biennium ending June 30, 2015*. The Governor's budget proposes nearly a half-million dollars in cuts each year in baseline operational funding for SBHCs, in addition to the proposed complete elimination of funding for new or expanded Centers in the educational Alliance Districts, which includes Windham.

In the last fiscal year, in response to the Governor's Education Reform Initiative, the Legislature allocated \$1.3 million dollars to fund 22 new or expanded School Based Health Centers in the Alliance Districts, including specific earmarks for new SBHCs in Pawcatuck and Hamden. Just last month, a Request for Proposal was released through the Department of Public Health to fund these new or expanded Centers. The proposals are due in March - but these proposed funding cuts will only allow the new or expanded sites to be open in May and June of 2013 if the Governor's reductions are allowed to stand. Surely this was not the intent of the Legislature when you appropriated the funding in the FY 13 budget. Nor, may I add, does this make any fiscal sense.

In December 2012, the Governor rescinded more than a half-million dollars from School Based Health Centers as part of his deficit reduction plan. The half-million dollars was taken from the 1.3 million dollars that had just been allocated by the Legislature for the new/expanded sites. Since the entire allocation for new or expanded health centers has been proposed to be eliminated in the FY2014 and FY2015 budget proposal, the continued reduction is being taken from operational funding to existing school based health centers.

While we understand the shared sacrifice we all have to make during these difficult fiscal times, the plan to annualize the rescission paired with the proposed elimination of expanded SBHC funding in the Alliance Districts equals a 15% decrease to the total state funding for the program. Funding reductions decrease direct clinical services - less clinical staff time to assess and treat student health problems and provide preventive care to keep them healthy and in school.

These reductions come at a time when the state has an urgent interest in the mental health of children and adolescents - a critical function of SBHCs. School Based Health Centers eliminate barriers to care -- particularly mental health care -- including location, cost, and the social stigma that prevents many adolescents from accessing the care they need. SBHC providers are trained to meet the unique needs of children and adolescents. The SBHC model that provides treatment in the school allows for more systematic detection, assessment, treatment, and monitoring of student health.

Every child who receives a physical through the Windham SBHC undergoes a risk assessment. This covers not only high risk behaviors such as sexual activity or substance use but also looks at weapon access and concerns about safety. This has helped us to identify students who were previously not considered to be at risk because they were achieving well academically and not a behavior problem in school.

Increasingly, schools have students with severe emotional and behavioral problems that less than 10 years ago would have been out-placed. School counselors are often restricted to

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serving students who have special needs that are affecting their academic performance. The SBHC is able to serve those students who do not qualify for special education yet have severe emotional issues. These are the students who “fly under the radar” and although teachers have a concern, the student does not meet the criteria for school counseling services.

We urge you to avoid these drastic reductions to School Based Health Center services. For so many children and families, the SBHC is the safety net that keeps children in school and parents at work.

Thank you.

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