

February 14, 2013

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

My name is Carolyn Franzen. I am a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) for the School Based Health Center, *The Wellness Center*, located at Windham High School.

I am writing this letter in opposition of 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.

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.

In December 2012, the Governor rescinded more than a half-million dollars from School Based Health Centers as part of his deficit reduction plan.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.

Reductions in direct service funding will greatly impact the students whom I work with at Windham High School. I provide mental health services for many students who would not receive mental health care without the Wellness Center accessibly located in their school. The mental health services provided by our SBHC reach beyond the scope of agencies located outside of the school by providing urgent violence prevention, mediations, and de-escalation --right in the immediate context of the school. At Windham High School, the SBHC is utilized by a high percentage of African-American and Latino adolescent males. These students represent populations who typically do not seek out mental health services located outside of school.

Please 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,

Carolyn Franzen, PhD, LMFT

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