

# **Pawcatuck Middle School**

*40 Field Street*

*Pawcatuck, Connecticut 06379-1996*

*Phone: (860) 599-5696 Fax: (860) 599-8948*

---

**Timothy B. Smith**  
*Principal*

**Thomas Bousquet**  
*Dean of Students*

**Pamela Krause-Choquette**  
*Guidance Counselor*

Sen. Harp, Rep. Walker and Members of the Appropriations committee:

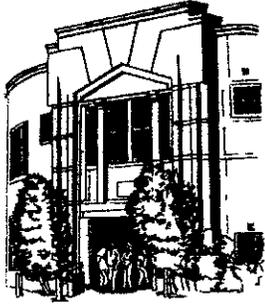
My name is Timothy B. Smith and I am the Principal of the Pawcatuck Middle School in the Pawcatuck section of the Stonington School District. I am here today to testify in opposition to HB 6350, An Act Concerning the Budget for the Biennium ending June 30, 2015. The Governor's budget proposes the total elimination of funding that was just approved by the legislature for a school based health center at Pawcatuck Middle School. This funding was to provide a part-time nurse practitioner and a full-time mental health therapist with access to a child & adolescent psychiatrist.

We approached Child and Family Agency several times to provide school based health center services to the students in the Pawcatuck Middle School, particularly for mental health. We have approximately 350 students, of which 32% qualify for free/reduced meals. The students are statistically significant in issues with school attendance, school nurse visits, mental health staff resources, discipline, and academic achievement. Pawcatuck, which is part of the larger and wealthier town of Stonington, has a population of 5,600 with a median household income roughly the same as Groton and Norwich; yet it, too, is considerably less than the state's average (\$55,846 compared to \$67,740). Consistent with these data, far more children under 18 live in poverty in Pawcatuck (13.9%) than in the state (12.2%). It is these children of poverty in Pawcatuck that we are trying to serve with this clinic.

The Child and Family Agency received \$100,000 in funding from the federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to renovate and equip space within our school for the nurse practitioner and mental health clinician's offices and exam room. This federal application was submitted because operational funding had already been assured by your appropriation to the Department of Public Health. We now potentially will have a newly renovated school based health center, but no funding to staff it.

Clearly it would be easy to connect the need for school based mental health support in the light of the tragedy in Newtown. The mental health screenings provided by school-based health centers have identified students with severe mental health issues that would not necessarily have been detected by observation of teachers or school support staff. For students identified with mental health problems, the ready accessibility of psychiatric evaluation, medication management, and therapy is key in helping children and their families respond in a timely manner before a lifelong burden of mental illness with potentially violent behavior occurs. In these days when everyone is trying to figure out how to prevent another Sandy Hook, we have a model of service delivery than can be a major part of the solution...another school based health center.

Instead, I want to go beyond the highly charged issue of school violence to the moral imperative to create the public schools we need. Connecticut continues to have the largest achievement gap in the country. Here at Pawcatuck Middle School, I believe that we are attacking the achievement gap by improving high quality instruction and curriculum. All of those efforts, however, are not enough if the



# Pawcatuck Middle School

40 Field Street

Pawcatuck, Connecticut 06379-1996

Phone: (860) 599-5696 Fax: (860) 599-8948

---

**Timothy B. Smith**  
*Principal*

**Thomas Bousquet**  
*Dean of Students*

**Pamela Krause-Choquette**  
*Guidance Counselor*

students themselves are not available to learn. The services of a school-based health center will reduce the lost school hours for students and families without a primary care physician. For these families, a simple case of strep throat can result in a full day spent waiting to be seen in a walk-in clinic or emergency room. The family counseling component can help us close the achievement gap by closing the gap between the school and parents by providing the services they need here at school, instead of offering a referral and putting the burden on these parents to find a provider for the services that they need. The clinic will reduce lost school time by reducing absences and increasing student's availability to learn by providing them with the mental health support services they need.

For these reasons I urgently request that *you* who represent the citizens of Connecticut, that *you* who these citizens depend on to keep them safe and healthy, do what is necessary to save the funding that *YOU* appropriated just last year. You knew then that an increase in school based health centers as part of the safety net for those who have few, if any, other resources was a moral imperative. In particular I am asking you now to please restore the funding for the Pawcatuck Middle School Based Health Center. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Timothy B. Smith', written over a horizontal line.

Timothy B. Smith  
Principal  
Pawcatuck Middle School