



Office of the
Healthcare
Advocate
STATE OF CONNECTICUT

**Testimony of Victoria Veltri
State Healthcare Advocate
Before the Appropriations Committee
February 15, 2013**

Good afternoon, Representative Walker, Senator Harp, Senator Kane, Representative Miner, and members of the Appropriations Committee. For the record, I am Vicki Veltri, State Healthcare Advocate with the Office Healthcare Advocate ("OHA"). OHA is an independent state agency with a three-fold mission: assuring managed care consumers have access to medically necessary healthcare; educating consumers about their rights and responsibilities under health insurance plans; and, informing you of problems consumers are facing in accessing care and proposing solutions to those problems.

I would like to commend the Governor's foresight and initiative by increasing resources to several important programs, including Young Adult Services, Supportive Funding, Home and Community Based Services and Traumatic Brain Injury placements, among others. This recognition of the importance and value of these services bolsters the safety net for some highly vulnerable populations and, through timely and appropriate support and care, can ultimately result in savings to the state by preventing manageable conditions from becoming unmanageable and more costly on a personal and financial level.

This philosophy of early intervention holds true for school-based health centers as well. As many of you know, OHA recently held a hearing to explore barriers to access for preventive and treatment services for behavioral health. This was prompted by the fact that behavioral health issues have been and remain the number one clinical issue our clients request assistance with. One area consistently identified as a key gap in the viability of Connecticut's current delivery system of mental health and substance use services was access to behavioral health services in a timely and appropriate manner. Early identification and treatment of behavioral health issues is not only broadly accepted as critical for proper management of behavioral health issues, but can also significantly change the trajectory of an individual's mental illness.

School-based health centers represent an efficient and highly effective means of promoting this ideal and improved screening and intervention for children in these settings is a simple measure to begin to tackle the monumental task of improving Connecticut's flawed behavioral health delivery system. In fact, both at our hearing and the legislative task force's mental health working group hearing, recommendations from providers, consumers and stakeholders focused on increased screening and interventions at schools and at school based health centers, which provide high quality mental health and substance use screening and treatment services. Our findings, detailed in a report on our website, are based on our years of work and witness to the struggles of children, adults and families to access needed services. The report is available online at http://www.ct.gov/oha/lib/oha/documents/publications/report_of_findings_and_recs_on_oha_hearing_1-2-13.pdf.) In addition, given the statistics surrounding substance use by Connecticut's youth, I would strongly support the inclusion of screening for substance use in this school-based assessment.

OHA's hearing made it clear that we have a tremendous amount of work to do to address the problems in our system, but by capitalizing on existing and proven programs and infrastructure, we can effect positive change quickly and efficiently.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to deliver OHA's testimony today. If you have any questions concerning my testimony, please feel free to contact me at victoria.veltri@ct.gov.