

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee: My name is Melanie Bonjour, and I am the School Based Health Center Director for three School Based Health Centers located in the City of Danbury.

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 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.

The oldest of my three School Based Health Centers, located on the grounds of Danbury High School was opened in 1994 and next year will celebrate twenty years of successful operation. The program has made a positive difference in an extremely large number of adolescents by providing them with critical medical and mental health care services in a timely and thorough manner. The School Based Health Centers in the City of Danbury are highly valued by the community and have earned the respect as a key safety net provider. My SBHC's, along with its fellow SBHC's in the State have also been supported over the two decades by CT's legislative leadership.

In the twenty years I have served as Director of the health centers I have been called to testify before the Public Health and Appropriations Committee's to defend the funding in the Department of Public Health budget for these needed health care services, and quite frankly, I am baffled as to why? I think it is time for the Department of Public Health and the State Legislature to step up to the plate and stop waffling on their position on how to best meet the health care needs for children. With all due respect, it seems utterly ridiculous that I am here today asking you to support the funding for these services.

The proposed reductions in HB 6350 come at a time when the state has an urgent interest in the mental health of children and adolescents - a critical function of SBHCs. As a SBHC Director and long time resident of Sandy Hook, CT, I know too well the critical importance of early detection and treatment of children's health care conditions. 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.

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.

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.