

Bonjour **HB 848**

Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson, and Members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Melanie Bonjour, and I am the Director of three School Based Health Centers (SBHC) located in the City of Danbury.

I am writing to you to express my deep concern and opposition to SB 848 which proposes to repeal funding in the current fiscal year budget for new or expanded Centers in the educational Alliance Districts.

The City of Danbury, the Danbury Public Schools and the Board of Education have a long, collaborative history in meeting the health and academic needs of students through the city's existing three School Based Health Centers. The current health centers, located in the middle schools and the high school, have consistently been models of effective practice in serving a population of approximately 5,200 students at the three center locations. In the Spring of 2014, the SBHC at Danbury High School will celebrate its 20th year of working with the school and community to address the vital medical, behavioral and oral health care needs of the city's adolescent population.

Recognizing the valuable role the SBHC's have played in early diagnosis and treatment of the students health needs, the community has long desired to establish a health center at one of the city's neediest elementary schools, namely Ellsworth Avenue School. It is no surprise that reaching students in their younger, formative years has a significant impact on their knowledge, attitude and behaviors for adopting health lifestyle practices. This in turn will have a positive effect on their contribution to family, school and their community.

Ellsworth Avenue Elementary School, with a population of 416 students, includes significant ethnic and financial disparity. Currently, the free and reduced lunch population is 77%, and this percentage has been steadily increasing over the past several years. As an indicator of key poverty, there has been a similar demand for medical care for those who are uninsured and undersinsured.

Mounting financial pressures has contributed to increased stress on families, resulting in issues related to anxiety, stress, and trauma in the children. The school social work staff are seeing a notable increase in elementary aged students requiring more intensive mental health care services than they are able to provide. Attempts to refer to community based agencies for timely intervention prove extremely challenging due to long waiting lists and insurance barriers.

The current funding opportunity to Alliance District communities is vital to the health and well-being on our community's young children.

On behalf of the City of Danbury, I urge you to avoid repealing and/or reducing any funding provisions for School Based Health Center services.

Thank you.