

**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 415:
An Act Establishing Additional School-Based Health Centers**

Sharon D. Langer, M.Ed., J.D.
Public Health Committee
March 14, 2014

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

I am testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families. I am a senior policy fellow at Connecticut Voices and much of my work focuses on policies that increase coverage and access to health care for children and families. I am also an appointed member of the Behavioral Health Partnership Oversight Council and co-chair the Council's Coordination of Care Committee.

Connecticut Voices **supports** *Senate Bill 415, An Act Establishing Additional School-Based Health Centers*. The proposed legislation would provide specified funds to establish five school-based health centers – two in elementary schools in Groton and three site serving children preK-12 in East Hartford. It is our understanding that there are school-based health centers in other schools in these two towns. By establishing these school-based sites, an additional 1,700 children in these communities will have increased access to a continuum of health care.¹

The expansion of school-based health centers in the education reform package in 2012 indicated a strong understanding on the part of lawmakers of the importance of addressing the holistic needs of children within school settings, including mental and physical health, to children's successful development.

We also know that schools are a critical part of the mental health care delivery system, providing approximately 70-80% of mental health services received by children in Connecticut. School-based health centers provide individual, group and family counseling for mental health issues in more than 40,000 visits on a yearly basis.² Offering services in schools can both reduce stigma and facilitate access, getting more services to hard-to-reach populations.

“School-based health centers are an effective way to meet the health and mental health needs of all students, including those who are at highest risk for negative outcomes. To be most effective, full access to mental health services, including crisis intervention, mental health screening, and counseling, must be fully included in the scope.”³

¹ Personal communication with Jesse White-Frese, Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of School-Based Health Centers, Inc. March 10, 2014.

² “Protecting the Health of Connecticut's Young People,” *Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers*, (October 2010), available at: <http://www.ctschoolhealth.org/Announcements/view.asp?id=54>

³ Bracey, JR, et al., Improving Outcomes for Children in Schools: Expanded School Mental Health. *Connecticut Health and Development Institute*. August 2013, available at: <http://www.chdi.org/SchoolMH-IMPACT>

Early intervention is an important investment for the state to make. It creates better outcomes for children and provides significant cost savings in the long run due to improved health and decreased usage of high cost emergency interventions, such as hospitalization and residential treatment.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit this testimony in support of S.B. 415. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need additional information or have questions.

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