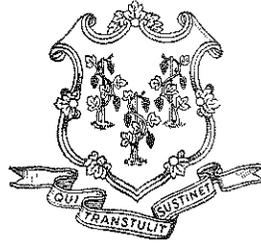


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Eighteenth District

Testimony to the Public Health Committee

SB 415 – AN ACT ESTABLISHING ADDITIONAL SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CENTERS

March 14, 2014

Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson, and members of the Public Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for SB 415 – An Act Establishing Additional School-Based Health Centers to your committee.

This bill would provide \$650,000 for the establishment of four school-based health centers (SBHC), two of which would be located at two Groton elementary schools. SBHCs partner with all primary care providers and are able to treat acute illnesses, screen for dental, vision and hearing problems, and focus on prevention, early intervention and risk reduction. They also provide an added benefit, due to being located within a school, of assisting single-parent and two-working-parent families to miss less work and students who are not seriously ill or seriously infectious miss less school.

There are currently five SBHCs in Groton, with enrollment ranging from 63% to 78% of each school's total student population. Groton's SBHCs clearly provide services that are being utilized.

The two schools identified in this bill, Mary Morrisson and Pleasant Valley Elementary Schools, are clearly two with the greatest need. Not only do they have a large student population eligible for free or reduced price meals (38.3% at Mary Morrisson, 37.9% at Pleasant Valley), which is an indicator of low socioeconomic status, as well as a turnover rate as high as 26% per year – 61% of the children at Mary Morrisson and 33% at Pleasant Valley are from military families.

A large benefit of SBHCs is their ability to break barriers to receiving care. Primary care practices in Groton are saturated, often experiencing significant periods where they do not accept new patients. The limited availability of appointments creates a burden for working parents who need to miss work to meet their children's needs. Furthermore, parents who are new to the community often have to wait weeks in order to get mandated school-entry physicals for their children. Quick access to physicals through Groton's SBHCs eliminates this limited appointment availability and ensures that children are not held out of school.

Similarly, the mental and behavioral health treatment capacity in southeastern Connecticut is chronically unable to meet service needs. While recent post-Newtown initiatives will likely make some improvements in early identification and referral, SBHC expansion is a necessary part of improving the availability of ongoing therapy services.

As mentioned earlier, Groton has a large population of military families, attributed to the Naval Submarine Base. While military children are covered by TRICARE, barriers to actual care are significant. Primary care is available on the submarine base and in the community, but transportation issues and scheduling challenges for working parents are at least as much of an issue for Navy families as they are for the general population. Also, Navy families have less access to mental and behavioral health services, as these on-base services have reduced over the years and TRICARE's credentialing requirements for Masters-level mental health clinicians are more rigorous and restrictive than Medicaid/HUSKY requirements. The Department of Public Health grants that subsidize SBHCs enable unrestricted access to services even when the specific clinician is not recognized by TRICARE.

The additional SBHCs included in SB 415 are very important to the families and students attending Mary Morrisson and Pleasant Valley Elementary Schools, allowing them to receive the care they need without the added burden to their parents. I respectfully urge the committee's favorable consideration of Senate Bill 415.

Sincerely,



Andrew M. Maynard
State Senator, 18th District