



## CONNECTICUT INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITIES, INC. SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CENTERS

*"HEALTHY KIDS MAKE BETTER LEARNERS"*

### **Testimony of the CT Institute For Communities, Inc. – School Based Health Center Programs To the Appropriations Committee – March 6, 2015**

#### **In Opposition to the CT Department of Public Health Budget Cuts Governor's Proposed FY 2016-2017 Biennial Budget**

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana, Representative Dillion and Members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Melanie Bonjour and I am the SBHC Manager for five School Based Health Centers (SBHCs) located in the City of Danbury and Town of Newtown.

Having been manager of SBHC's from their early years of inception in the early 90's to today, I have experienced first-hand the critical role the health care centers have played in increasing timely access to needed health care for Connecticut's children. Working with bare bones budgets, the staff have consistently provided on-site medical and behavioral health services to students in a cost effective manner, saving the State dollars by keeping the students out of the emergency room and other more costly systems of care.

With a strong health promotion focus and emphasis on population health, the School Based Health Center staff provide students with health related information and skills needed to prevent problems from occurring or spiraling out of control, saving the State even more dollars by keeping children healthy and thriving.

As many of you are aware, the SBHCs have experienced very limited increases in their DPH line item allocation over the years. While CT's SBHCs were first in the country to work with the State Medicaid office to create legislative change which enabled the health centers to bill Medicaid and later private insurers, revenue collections for the health centers have not proven sufficient to substantially cover the cost of delivering services. While the Governor's rationale for his proposed budget reduction is an increase in HUSKY covered patient caseloads, what he fails to understand is that while the SBHCs effectively bill for services provided to patients, a significant number of patients obtaining care are not eligible for HUSKY insurance, many of the services provided by the SBHCs are not reimbursable under the Medicaid and commercial plans, that the population of residents signing up for the HUSKY insurance under the Affordable Care Act is not reflective of the ages of the patients who use the SBHCs, and there are numerous billing challenges that prohibit the SBHCs from generating revenue to fully sustain the SBHCs.

While throughout this legislative session there has been significant focus on the need for increasing the availability of behavioral health screening and early intervention of mental health services for school aged children, little attention has been placed on the tremendous success SBHCs have had in effectively increasing access and follow-up to behavioral health services. Located in the schools where the children are on a daily basis, the SBHCs play a valuable role in early intervention and assure compliance to care due to their day to day interaction with the students and their presence in the school building.

Danbury High School SBHC, 43 Clapboard Ridge Road, Danbury, CT 06811 (203) 790-2886

Broadview Middle School SBHC, 72 Hospital Avenue, Danbury, CT 06810 (203) 731-8272

Rogers Park Middle School SBHC, 21 Memorial Drive, Danbury, CT 06810 (203) 778-7479

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In a *January 2010 Mental Health Care "Blueprint" for Connecticut Children Report* filed by the Joint Task Force of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Connecticut Chapter of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, it proposed an increase in school based mental health care through utilizing a public health approach to service delivery that calls on the "success of the School Based Health Center experience across the State". The cornerstone of this model is collaboration of an interdisciplinary team (a.k.a. CT's SBHCs).

The document's executive summary concludes with "The proposal will save the state money by targeting the many children who desperately require mental health services, thus avoiding the immediate and long term consequences of leaving so many children untreated", yet the Governor's proposed budget calls for reduction in funding for the very services that have proven successful in meeting the mental health needs of a very vulnerable portion of our population.

On Friday, March 13<sup>th</sup>, the Town of Newtown will be celebrating the opening of its first School Based Health Center located at the Newtown Middle School. Aware of the effectiveness and success of the School Based Health care delivery model, the community has fully embraced the concept of the health center, confident it will provide a critical role in addressing the tremendous mental health needs of a very fragile community as a result of the Sandy Hook tragedy.

The Governor's proposed budget calls for reductions to SBHC programs that are in addition to his recent budget mitigation cuts imposed this fiscal year. This includes a \$24,354 cut in funding for the Danbury SBHCs and a \$9,784 cut for the newly established Newtown SBHC, a site which has yet to serve patients.

These devastating cuts to the SBHCs will hurt children families and the health of our communities, negatively impacting the health care provider work force and essentially dismantling both existing and new programs.

While we work to provide critical services to CT's children so that we prevent tragedies like that which occurred in Sandy Hook, we ask that you do all you can to restore the level of funding to the DPH line item for SBHCs.

Thank you.

Respectfully Submitted,



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