



**Testimony of the CT Association of School Based Health Centers
Appropriations Committee - March 6, 2015**

**In Opposition to Department of Public Health budget cuts
Governor's proposed FY 2016-2017 Biennial Budget**

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana, Representative Dillon and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jesse White-Fresé and I am the Executive Director of the CT Association of School Based Health Centers. My testimony today is in opposition to the significant proposed reductions to the DPH budget for School Based Health Centers.

Connecticut has wisely invested in SBHCs as one of the best ways to create access to physical health, behavioral health, and oral health care for young people. State funding allows SBHCs to operate in 92 schools in 22 communities. Young people turn to their SBHCs for the critical help they need in dealing with many difficult and sometimes debilitating physical and behavioral health issues.

Our return on investment is that young people connect with a trusted adult; improve their health and school performance; graduate from high school; and become healthy, productive adults. SBHCs keep young people out of the emergency department for many mental health crises, reducing unnecessary costs to our healthcare system. State funding is essential to keep these programs viable.

The CT Children's Behavioral Health Implementation Plan (PA 13-178) identifies schools as an opportune place to address the behavioral health needs of children and recommends expanding SBHCs to meet those needs. The Governor's Education Reform Initiative provided funding to create new or expanded SBHCs in our state's lowest performing schools --10 new SBHC sites opened and 6 expanded staff hours to meet the increased demand for services. In the last 4 years, mental health visits to SBHCs increased by 11% -- from 30% of total visits to 41% of total visits (DPH data, 2013). These examples provide compelling evidence that School Based Health Centers are a critical safety net for children and adolescents. In spite of this evidence, the proposed reductions are dismantling the School Based Health Center program.

- The rescission in January 2015 reduced the FY15 budget allocation of \$12,638,716 to \$12,048,716 - a \$590,000 (5%) cut to the entire SBHC program.
- The Governor's Budget for FY16-17 annualizes the rescission to \$12,048,716 and cuts the SBHC line item by an additional \$1 million in FY16 (to \$11.02 million). The FY17 line item is further reduced to \$10.7 million. The total reduction from the pre-rescission amount for FY15 = \$1,855,114.
- The reduction is based on the assumption that there will be HUSKY caseload growth in SBHCs. However, health insurance data from the 2012 Census for Connecticut indicates that a small number of youth under 18 were uninsured for a 12 month period (<3%). It is not known if this small number of youth attend schools with an SBHC or if they are able to become insured. The growth in insured individuals in CT occurred in adults over the age of 18 that are typically not in school.

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- SBHCs bill HUSKY and private insurance whenever possible, yet reimbursements support a small percentage of operations. There are many barriers associated with billing for services that include: preventive and care coordination services that are not covered by public or private insurance; high deductibles that must be met before services are reimbursed; denial of service for mental health treatment; limited visits on parent's insurance plan; many services are confidential; and difficulty obtaining accurate insurance information.
- There is no federal funding stream to support SBHC operations.
- These cuts are already resulting in reduced clinical staff hours, staff layoffs, and early closures. The health of vulnerable children will be comprised.

It is the words of the youth served by SBHCs that matter most. The proposed cuts will directly impact them. Randall is in high school and uses his SBHC. He writes:

“Last year several people close to me passed away, including my 17 year old cousin. After he died I wasn't the same. I was very stressed and had headaches every day. I went to the SBHC and the nurse practitioner provided treatment for my constant headaches. I started seeing the social worker to learn how to manage my headaches and stress. Without the SBHC I don't know where I would be.

I no longer have daily headaches, and when I need help with a personal issue I know I can always come to the SBHC. My health has improved so much because of the SBHC and I can say that my life would not be the same without it.”

We respectfully request that you restore full funding to the SBHC program so that 40,000 CT students that use the services every year can continue to grow, thrive, and succeed.

Thank you.

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