

March 6, 2015

Sen. Bye, Rep. Walker, Sen. Gerratana, Rep. Dillon and Members of the Health Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is JoAnn Eaccarino and I am writing in opposition to HB 6824 concerning the cuts in the budget to School Based Health Centers. I am a nurse practitioner and have been working in School Based Health Centers for over 20 years. I have seen the change in the services provided over these years, particularly in behavioral health. The acuity of the problems has become so much more prominent, likely based on the fact that children/adolescents who were formerly in higher levels of care are now being served in the community.....and because of our barrier-free access, that community is often "us".

I certainly understand that hard choices have to be made by you, but I thought about a criterion that might be used in making those decisions: want vs. need. There are many things that we "want" that will make our state a better place to live and work. But we are talking about a definite situation of "need". A child that can't breathe because they're new from out-of-the-country and doesn't yet have a primary care provider in the community NEEDS someone to help them get the assessment, treatment and education they need so that they can adequately function at school and at home and don't end up in the hospital. An adolescent that is so depressed that he/she can't get out of bed in the morning to go to school ...or is thinking of hurting himself/herself or someone else NEEDS help now...not when the economy improves.

These are real live kids standing before us every day. If we aren't there to help them there may not be anyone else, or anywhere else to go. We can pay for this now...or pay later at a much higher cost. An asthma visit to the SBHC costs about \$125 with a nebulizer treatment, follow-up, and intensive education. That same visit to the Emergency Dept. would be over \$1000. and would not include the follow-up and education which are critical to actual improvement. And as regards behavioral health, we have too many examples of the devastation that occurs (suicide/homicide/family violence, etc.) when mental health problems are not addressed in a timely manner.

The cut proposed in the Governor's budget will unravel the safety net that has been one of Connecticut's objects of pride for over 25 years. Connecticut is recognized nationally as the gold standard in the structure of their School Based Health Centers. However, this shouldn't be the reason to restore their funding. It is for the children, adolescents and families that are dependent on the services provided by this efficient, cost-effective, barrier-free program in our communities.

I will close with part of testimony presented two years ago, a letter from a student to her SBHC therapist who says it better than anyone of us ever could: "I wanted to write this to say thank you. I wouldn't be able to say this aloud without crying. I owe you everything. If I had never met you, I could be dead right now. I'm so grateful. You helped me, gave me hope, encouraged me, and saved me. You knew exactly what I needed. You helped me understand and understood me when no one else did. You gave me courage. You let me finally show my feelings. You didn't judge me. You let me cry, talk, and just ramble. But most of all, you showed me I can trust people. You showed me what life has to offer. Thank you so much. You changed my life. I will never forget you".