



Integrated Health Services, Inc.

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Testimony to the Appropriation Committee: HB 6824: State Budget Specific to the proposed \$1.85 million cut to support School Based Health Center Programs.

March 6, 2015

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee: My name is Deborah Poerio, and I am President of Integrated Health Services, the non-profit organization that administers 7 School Based Health Centers in East Hartford, Connecticut. Most importantly, I have been a Nurse Practitioner for 29 years, of which most of that time has been providing services to underinsured children in Connecticut that had little access to those services.

That is why I am submitting testimony to oppose the proposed \$1.85 million cut to Connecticut's School Based Health Centers who serve the population at greatest risk, in greatest need: Underinsured children.

The proposed cut was based upon the premise that revenue to school based health centers would increase proportionately to HUSKY enrollment in the new state system. Unfortunately, this is not the case. As verified by Connecticut Voices for Children at the Managed Care Program's Oversight Committee on February 28, 2015, most children who are eligible for HUSKY are enrolled already and the Department of Social Services does not anticipate a significant change in this population.

As a small non-profit health care program providing service to poor children and their families, I am all too aware of the budget crisis and the impact it has on the population in greatest need, and least represented. However **BASIC HEALTH CARE** for children is not something we should have to justify, it should be a right. We have witnessed the tremendous impact that poor access to preventive health has on children and our budget:

- 1) Increase in infectious diseases (i.e Measles) which impacts the workforce (parents staying home) and our schools (children's academic interruption), as well as the financial strain it places on our hospitals and Health Departments.
- 2) Lack of access to preventive behavioral health cause us to miss issues that could prove devastating (Sandy Hook)
- 3) Lack of access to dental care will return us to a place where child mortality rises due to untreated decay & abscesses
- 4) Lack of access to early behavioral health intervention increases children's risk for social & academic failure and places them at risk for future early delinquent behavior such as: substance use, abuse, early sexual experimentation, pregnancy and gang-related activity in adolescence.

There are areas in the budget for consideration that would allow cost shifting of funds to support the SBHCs:

- Many FQHCs are currently receiving state funding to support their SBHCs (19), competing against those solely state funded SBHCs (69) however they have access to federal funding that state funded sites do not. The state requirements for reporting are less stringent than federal which is why many compete for state funding (refer back to SBHC definition justification).



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- Governor's Second Chance Funding- \$1 million in School-Based Diversion Initiative designed to prevent in-school arrests and reduce suspensions/expulsions by increasing access to community based mental health prevention and treatment programs for children and parents.
- Inclusion of SBHCs into the SIM (State Innovation) project (DSS) for funding Asthma or BH Initiatives such as the preschool behavioral health initiative (ADAPT) implemented by IHS in collaboration with East Hartford Schools.

The state is in a fiscal crisis, one that will only worsen if our youngest underinsured population at greatest risk loses its access to affordable, accessible, and comprehensive care. This is the time to increase, not decrease funding to organizations that prove cost effective while ensuring high quality care to children.

We are fortunate to have a Governor and legislature who have the foresight to know the positive impact that an investment into children's health and education has on their future academic, social, and emotional success evidenced by their commitment to the expansion of SBHCs and early education initiatives. I therefore implore you to continue to support the Governor's and legislature's investment in our children's future by re-instating full funding for the SBHC Program utilizing funds from other areas of the budget. Thank you very much for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Deborah Poerio".

Deborah Poerio, APRN, MS, FNP-BC
President/CEO,
Integrated Health Services, Inc.