

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana, Representative Dillon and Members of the Appropriations Committee: My name is Dennis Torres and I am the Director of School Based Health Centers for Family Centers Inc., in Stamford CT. Additionally, I am Vice-President of the Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers.

I am submitting this written testimony in opposition to HB 6824. As a Connecticut constituent and someone who works with struggling families in lower Fairfield County, I am writing you in opposition to the Governor's proposed cuts to School Based Health Centers. As you know, School Based Health Centers provide access to care without any barriers, contribute to a healthier and more productive student population and result in economic savings to the communities where they are located. In the last year, Stamford SBHC staff have vaccinated hundreds of children, averted emergency room visits, provided crisis intervention avoiding student self-harm and provided quality dental care to students who would have gone without otherwise. All of this accomplished in over 5,250 medical, mental health and dental visits in the last year (also thousands of kids reached through our school-wide health education efforts including smoking prevention, nutrition awareness and suicide prevention). The costs associated with the operation of SBHC's are miniscule in comparison to the cost of the life of a child saved from a suicide. It's that serious.

At a time when the State of Connecticut is hyper-focused on the welfare of children and adolescents, particularly mental health, School Based Health Centers is one of the best ways to reach kids. I am aware that our budget is challenging this year, but I am asking you not to balance the budget by cutting services to our most vulnerable population.

If you want to learn more about our School Based Health Centers, please contact me so that I may help arrange a visit in your community. If you have never been to a School Based Health Center, I know you will be impressed. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully;

Thank you.

Dennis Torres, Director of Healthcare Programs
Family Centers Inc., School Based Health Centers in Stamford
888 Washington Blvd, 8th floor
Stamford CT 06901