



Good afternoon Senator Bartomoleo, Representative Urban and members of the Children's Committee. My name is JoAnn Eaccarino, and I am testifying today on behalf of the CT Association of School Based Health Centers (CASBHC) in support of RB 841, *An Act Concerning the Implementation of a Comprehensive Children's Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Health Plan*.

As a member of the Advisory Committee, the Association recognizes the significant work that was done in developing the plan, and supports the recommendations that followed.

One of those recommendations is to strengthen the role of schools in addressing the behavioral health needs of students. The report identifies School Based Health Centers (SBHCs) as an effective method for providing mental and behavioral health care in schools and recommends the expansion of the number of School Based Health Centers.

School Based Health Centers provide care in an integrated model that co-locates medical and mental health providers. In this comprehensive model physical conditions are identified and treated, many of which also have a mental health component. A common scenario is that an obese student is receiving counseling regarding nutrition and physical activity from the nurse practitioner, and then reveals that he/she is being bullied by a group of classmates about their weight and that they have started to think about hurting themselves. Seamless referral to the mental health clinician enables immediate intervention with the student to address their concerns and help the student identify support systems and positive coping strategies. Barrier-free follow-up, the hallmark of the SBHCs, ensures that the student is getting what he/she needs in a timely manner.

Youth present with many issues such as chronic illness, family or community violence, homelessness, bullying, physical and sexual abuse, loss of a loved one. These issues lead them to seek help in the safety and familiarity of their School Based Health Center. Children and adolescents are treated every day in these centers for anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, major depression, self-injury, and trauma. It should be obvious to all that this impacts school performance and academic achievement, not to mention their long term mental health and the ability to function into adulthood as healthy members of society.

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Every year, more than 40,000 students use the services of their SBHCs in more than 130,000 visits. Recent data shows that 41% of those visits are for mental health concerns which is an increase of over 10% over four years. This data supports the need to provide mental health services in the school setting -- services that are barrier free and offered regardless of insurance status so that our young people can optimize their learning and experience academic and social success.

We urge you to approve RB841 and support the recommendations of the Children's Behavioral Health Implementation Plan.

Thank you.

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