



Integrated Health Services, Inc.

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Testimony to the Education Committee: SB NO. 917: An Act Concerning School Based Health Centers.
March 16, 2015

Members of the Public Health Committee: My name is Deborah Poerio, and I am President of Integrated Health Services, the non-profit organization that has operated 7 School Based Health Centers (SBHC) in East Hartford, Connecticut for 21 years. I have had the privilege of working to support the legislature's commitment to assure access for children in greatest need to medical, behavioral and dental care. Although the increases in funding have not equated to the rise in health care costs, our programs have prided themselves on ensuring the provision of high quality care to each family and child.

To further support our efforts to support the SBHC goal to assure high quality services to address the needs of our children, the legislature had created a SBHC Advisory Board whose mission was to develop standards and a definition for SBHCs so that parents who move communities can be assured that the same quality and services exist in any other program referring to themselves as a SBHC. As a committee member, I am proud to say that the standards we have set forth for your approval, support such a mission and vision of SBHCs in Connecticut.

However, I believe the definition is far too broad, and allow programs that do not offer medical and behavioral services on site for 40 hours per week, to be considered a SBHC. Rather, I believe we should consider another category for those programs that only offer one service (behavioral or medical) or for those offering on site medical and behavioral health services less than 40 hours per week. I suggest that these programs be called "enhanced school services" that must adhere to the standards of the discipline they represent as defined by the language as outlined in the standards, while programs designated as "SBHCs" would adhere to the standards of both disciplines, and be operational for 40 hours per week.

School Based Health Centers are "centers" that parents, children, and the school system count on to provide services for the academic year, and imply the coordination of care between medical, behavioral, parents, and school personnel. Those programs offering only one service (medical, behavioral, or dental) should not be responsible for coordinating care for the other disciplines if they are not providing them and will not be collecting comprehensive outcome data, and therefore are not a "health center", but a "clinic" as they specialize in offering only one service.

My proposed definition will have no impact on currently funded programs, and one could consider a "grandfathering in" of those programs that currently do not comply that are funded by DPH currently. However, if we are going to finally create a definition to ensure high quality, well-defined services, then we need the definition to be more specific than that put forth in this bill.

I applaud the SBHC Advisory Board and the Department of Public Health for supporting the needs for high standards, and only urge you to ensure this further by creating a definition that is specific to the standards of each type of SBHC and enhanced school service programs.

We are fortunate to have a Governor, legislature, and Public Health Committee who possess the foresight to understand that an investment into children's health care is an investment in our future. I am confident that you will see the wisdom in a comprehensive approach to this issue, and offer any assistance I could provide to ensure a definition worthy of the standards we have set forth. 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

