



Testimony in Opposition to HB 5044, *An Act Making Adjustment to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2017*

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana, and Representative Dillon. My name is Jesse White-Fresé, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers. I am providing written testimony in opposition to HB 5044, most notably the proposed reductions to School Based Health Centers in the Department of Public Health portion of the budget.

Between January and July 2015, SBHC funding was reduced by \$891,218 between rescissions and overall budget reductions. In December 2015, a rescission removed an additional \$117,474 from the line item. After this total \$1.09 million reduction, the current allocation for SBHCs is \$11,630,024.

The Governor's budget proposes to reduce SBHCs an additional \$477,431 *during the current fiscal year*, annualizes that reduction, and proposes to cut an additional 5.75% from SBHCs in FY17 for a total cut of \$1.24 million. This will set SBHC funding back to 2010 levels while the number of sites has grown from 82 to 96 during that same period, including expansion of sites through the education reform Alliance District initiative.

As you well know, school based health centers (SBHCs) provide students with immediate access to care for many serious health issues that impact school performance and academic success. SBHCs are one of the *most effective* ways to keep students healthy and attending school so they can continue to learn - and the care provided there is cost-effective as well.

These funding reductions *impact direct care* to students! SBHCs cannot sustain these cuts and still meet the increasing demand for services that keep children healthy and in school. In the last 5 years, visits to SBHCs for mental health services have increased by 11%; from 30% of all visits to 41% of all visits. This is a critical service supported by the Children's Behavioral Health Plan in Connecticut. Research shows that students that use the SBHC are 74% more likely to get the mental health care they need than non-users of SBHCs. Scaling back on school based health centers essentially closes the door on this tremendous achievement.

Connecticut's SBHCs are working hard to align with health care reforms to provide the highest quality care possible, while managing costs and improving health outcomes for young people to avoid the costly services of emergency departments and years of unmet health needs. Connecticut is proud to be one of four states nationally participating in a National Quality Initiative that is developing performance standards for SBHCs. We are one of two states piloting a rigorous set of standards to develop an SBHC specific 'medical home' model. We are working very closely with the Committee on Children in a results-based accountability project to demonstrate that the state's investment in SBHCs is yielding improved health and academic outcomes for youth. The 96 SBHC sites funded by the Department of Public Health have succeeded in creating RBA Report Cards to illustrate improvements in care for asthma, improved functioning in students that receive mental health treatment, reduction in sexually transmitted diseases, increasing immunization rates, screening and treatment for depression, BMI testing and nutritional counseling, and more.

Connecticut's SBHC have a strong commitment to child and adolescent health and have taken a leadership role nationally based on its integrated care model in SBHCs, where the sites provide medical and behavioral health co-located in the health center. Some sites have added dental services as well. The sites take their charge very seriously and strive every day to meet the complex health issues faced by students. The child poverty rate in Connecticut continues to climb, and school based health centers have been present every day to help students cope with a myriad of issues that impact their health and their academic performance.

The funding reductions to school based health centers have been significant over the last few years. The operations of the sites are lean and efficient. Further reductions will lead to less staff hours, less days per week of service, and the potential closing of some sites. We respectfully ask you to maintain current funding levels for SBHCs. School based health centers provide core social services with proven results!

Please contact me with any questions, or if I can assist you with any information.

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