

Good afternoon Senator Gerratana and Representative Dillon,

Thank you for allowing me to come before you and speak on behalf of the SBHC's of Branford CT. We are not in support of the HB 5044.

School based health centers(SBHCs) are an important research based strategy for creating access to health care and reducing healthcare disparities amongst our students.

Children today have more stress than ever before that place increasing numbers of children at risk. For many of these children behavioral health and medical services are not available due to cost, lack of insurance coverage, waiting lists, or due to parents that are struggling with multiple jobs and work schedules that make it too difficult to bring their children to an appointment. SBHCs offer an effective approach to addressing all of these issues.

Children who utilize SBHCs can access needed health care without embarrassment or stigma. Because the centers offer a range of health care services the purpose of a visit is not readily identifiable. Additionally, the fact that children are already in school addresses the issues of accessibility and care can be made affordable to all of the children. School social workers and nurses can coordinate services with the SBHCs.

SBHC's typically offer mental health treatment, address acute conditions, treat injuries, provide preventive medical exams, oral health care, provide follow-up care and offer health education. These are services that benefit the student, the student's family, and the school system by having a healthier student body.

This bill will significantly cut those services, those hours, and limit staff availability therefore being counterproductive to the mission of SBHCs. Schools do not function in a vacuum. When

students cross that school door they bring with them the life stresses of their family, impacts of poverty, trauma, fears, health problems. All of these factors are obstacles to learning. All of these obstacles are brought into the classroom. The medical and behavioral staff of SBHC's breaks through these barriers by providing students with a safe place to seek care within the school. This in turn allows students to return to the classroom ready to be productive in their educational learning.

That is why it is imperative that you vote NO on HB 5044.