

I am writing to you to express my concern about the budget cuts planned for School Based Health Centers around the State of CT. I began working at the Rogers Park Middle School, School Based Health Center in Danbury last year, and before that time, knew very little about their purpose or capabilities. I am wondering if you know anything about the School Based Health Centers and what they do on a daily basis! I would like to give you some insight into what the School Based Health Center is comprised of. The School Based Health Center (SBHC) includes medical services provided by a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner, Mental Health services provided by a licensed Psychotherapist and dental services provided by a Pediatric Dentist and hygienist. Each and every day, children come to the SBHC with medical or mental health needs that would otherwise have resulted in the child having to leave school to receive treatment. At the SBHC, they receive the care they need while staying in school and resulting in only a fraction of time being missed from their school day therefore not interrupting their learning. Parents are able to remain at work and not risk jeopardizing their jobs by having to leave on numerous occasions to transport their children to doctor, counselor or dental appointments. Many of these children would not receive the care they need because their parent/guardian would have to choose between working or bringing them to appointments, and in many cases, do not have the access to transportation to get their children to appointments. The SBHC is the first step for children to advocate for the care they need to become healthy, successful learners. On any given day, the Nurse Practitioner will see children with viral symptoms, gastrointestinal issues, ear pain, sleep problems, children in crisis due to asthma symptoms, or injury, just to name a few! Many times these children will present with physical symptoms and once the child is evaluated by the Nurse Practitioner, it is discovered the child has home and/or school stressors that need to be addressed by a Mental Health Professional. If these children were not seen during this vulnerable time, due to the window of opportunity given to them by the SBHC being within their school, their symptoms could easily manifest themselves into something more serious. The Mental Health counselor sees between 7-9 children a day, with children on a waitlist. Their need for behavioral health care is brought to the counselor's attention either by faculty, guidance counselors, school nurses, or the SBHC Nurse Practitioner, again due to the accessibility to care within the school. Good mental health proves to be the catalyst for good physical health, eager and enthusiastic learners, and successful members of the community. This city has a large immigrant population and these children need access to care on their own. They need to advocate for themselves in many cases. The SBHC is where they go. They know by coming to the SBHC, they will be given the care, assistance or direction they need. The School Based Health Centers work on a bare bones budget and cannot afford any further cuts in this budget as it would result in reduced staff and available care hours in the school. These children need our help and they are not in the position to reach the legislators to let them know this on their own. Please reconsider the cuts you have made in the School Based Health Center budget for the sake of the children who can't speak to you themselves but need someone to hear them! I thank you for your time and hope that this helps you to see the essential role the School Based Health Centers play in the schools for the children of the State of Connecticut and making any further cuts in this budget jeopardizes the wellbeing of the youth population of our State!