

“Oral health for all”



February 18, 2016
Appropriations Committee
Legislative Office Building
300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford CT 06106

Re: Governor's FY 2017 Midterm Budget for the Department of Public Health

Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Mary Moran Boudreau and I serve as the Executive Director of the Connecticut Oral Health Initiative (COHI). COHI is the only non-profit in the state with the sole mission of Oral Health for All; specifically, we advocate for increased access to oral health care and coverage, and oral health equity. I am here to address Governor Malloy's midterm adjustments to the FY 2017 budget for the Department of Public Health (DPH). These adjustments will affect oral health service delivery, coverage and equity. **We urge you to reject any proposals to dismantle the effective efforts of the Department of Public Health, including support of Community Health Centers, School Based Health Centers, and the Office of Oral Health.**

Governor Malloy's budget eliminates grant funding from DPH to the Community Health Centers. The State of Connecticut has been supportive of federally-qualified health centers (FQHCs), which, altogether, provide over 350,000 state residents with high-quality dental care, among other services. FQHCs provide care all across the state, in urban, rural and suburban areas. All of you on this Committee have health center patients in your districts.

Some might argue that the Affordable Care Act, which has increased the number of insured people in our state, eliminates the need for this grant. **However, health centers continue to see uninsured patients – in 2014, 18.5% of health center patients were uninsured – because they are some of the only providers who will.** Additionally, many of the plans sold on Access Health CT come with large deductibles, particularly for oral health care, making these plans inaccessible for adults and children insured through Access Health CT. Individuals seeking health care services before they have hit their deductible are often unable to pay full cost out-of-pocket; at health centers, they are offered payment on a sliding fee scale. These grants fill in the gaps left by underpayments through both Medicaid and the sliding fee scale; namely, they support clinician salaries, administrative and other costs associated with providing high-quality comprehensive health care services. I urge you to reject this proposal.

Additionally, the Governor's budget reduces funding to School Based Health Centers (SBHCs) which provide vital dental care to children that are statistically low utilizers of oral health care. SBHCs are one of the most effective ways to keep students healthy and attending school so they can continue to learn. SBHCs cannot sustain these cuts and still meet the increasing demand for services that keep children healthy and in school. **Report Cards show success of SBHCs in improving the physical health, mental health, and dental health of our most vulnerable population.**

Lastly, we know that there are difficult decisions ahead in this budgeting process. Governor Malloy has proposed that at least 1000 jobs should be eliminated from state government to reduce spending. Should you concur with this finding, we urge you to reject any proposal that eliminates or reduces

“Oral health for all”



funding to the Office of Oral Health. **The Office of Oral Health leads programs affecting the dental health of children and older adults, to reduce dental disease within these populations.** Notably, the Office of Oral Health provides oral health data surveillance used to obtain federal grants, and used in planning by the State Health Improvement Plan, the Connecticut Coalition on Oral Health, the Consortium on Oral Health for Older Adults and the Connecticut Oral Health Initiative. The Office of Oral Health also administers programs addressing fluoridation, dental sealants and the integration of oral health into health systems.

Most significantly, all of the measures addressed above have the underlying theme of health equity. The disparities between regions and populations in Connecticut are of great concern to many advocates. Oral health advocates are pleased to say that we are ahead of the curve in addressing issues of equity, due to the work of Community Health Centers, School Based Health Centers, and programs and services such as those offered by the Office of Oral Health. Although we have much to do to close the health equity gaps in Connecticut, the aforementioned programs and services are vital to this continued work.

We urge you to reject any proposals to dismantle these efforts.

I would appreciate your consideration of the aforementioned concerns during your budget deliberations. I am available for further discussion of these issues at your convenience.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary Moran Boudreau
Executive Director

860-246-2644 Extension 203
maryb@ctoralhealth.org