Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Verna Bernard-Jones. I am a registered voter in Prospect, CT. I am writing today in my role as a school nurse in Harford Public Schools for 23 years.

I am submitting testimony on the Governor’s proposed biennial budget. I am especially concerned about yet another proposed cut of almost $200,000 to the School Based Health Clinics line item in the Department of Public Health (DPH) budget.

Every child deserves a chance to be healthy and to reach their full potential in life. However, many children have health problems that make it difficult for them to learn and succeed. We want young people in CT to be healthy and thriving. School Based Health Centers (SBHCs) are an effective, integrated and cost-effective way to help young people with their health challenges – including their mental health issues, their physical health concerns, or their oral health challenges. Supporting students with their health challenges where they spend most of their waking hours during the week, in schools, also contributes to keeping them learning in classrooms, reducing absenteeism and improving graduation rates for youth.
The School Based Health Centers (SBHCs) in the Hartford Public schools have been invaluable to our students. Many of our students do not have a Primary Care Provider (PCP). In fact, for a large majority the only healthcare services they receive is through the SBHC.

The SBHC provides the state mandated physicals and immunizations at Kindergarten, 6th grade and 10th grade free of charge for any student in the school district. The SBHC nursing and medical staff provide reproductive services, health teaching and counseling for the most vulnerable young adults in our state. These students often cannot access these services outside of the school setting. In Hartford we have many students who are refugees from war torn countries who need vaccinations, physicals, dental care and mental health care. These services are all provided in coordination with the school nurse and the SBHC.

I urge you to protect the health and wellbeing of our youngest CT residents by supporting the essential and core services that School Based Health Centers provide. Please maintain funding for SBHCs in our state so that young people can continue to thrive and stay in school. This is critical to their future and to the future of our state.

Thank you for supporting School Based Health Centers!