Testimony of CT Association of School Based Health Centers (CASBHC)
Appropriations Committee

OPPOSING cuts to School Based Health Centers (SBHCs) in
H.B. 7148 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNUIUM ENDING JUNE
THIRTIETH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFORE
Friday March 1, 2019

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

My name is Daniela Giordano and I am the new Executive Director of the CT Association of School Based Health Centers (CASBHC) – an advocacy and networking organization committed to increasing access to quality health care for all children and adolescents in Connecticut schools. I am here to testify in opposition to cuts in the proposed budget HB 7148 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2021, and Making Appropriations Therefore. 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. This proposed cut (from $10,743,232 (FY19) to $10,550,187 (in both FY2020 and FY2021), would continue a repeated reduction in this effective and cost-effective model of School Based Health Centers (SBHCs), a health care model which is already operated in incredibly lean and efficient ways. This continued reduction would place additional strain on SBHCs, possible forcing sites to reduce staffing and operational hours. The biggest negative impact would be felt by the young children and adolescent students who use these services and rely on them to provide trusted, reliable, effective, barrier-free and physical and mental/emotional health integrated care.

You have heard and read about some of the impactful and touching individual stories that SBHC staff or students and families have shared here today (or previously). These are tremendous stories of students connecting with caring providers they trust and who make a distinct difference in their lives. Now imagine these stories multiplied by several thousands! These are the interactions, connections and treatments that students benefit from every day in schools through CT’s SBHCs and their allies – what students often call

Healthy Kids Make Better Learners
CASBHC at 203-230-9976 and www.ctschoolhealth.org
their ‘safe havens’. We all care about the children in our communities. And we can all agree that every child deserves a chance to be healthy and to reach their full potential in life. But many children deal with health problems that make it difficult for them to learn and succeed. We want young people in CT to be healthy and thriving. These young people will become young adults who we want to support in being healthy and productive residents of our state.

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 the majority of their time, right in schools, also contributes to keeping them learning in classrooms (increasing ‘seat time’) and reducing absenteeism. A large body of evidence supports a connection between students’ health status and academic performance.

For example, SBHCs:

- Reduce the use of emergency rooms (for example for treatment of asthma attacks), which saves money and produces effective outcomes;
- Are able to intervene early to avoid chronic absenteeism due to health issues;
- Increase access to mental health services, including for adolescents;
- Receive high student satisfaction ratings on quality of care and relationships with staff;
- Help students learn new health habits, and/or how to better manage their health issues;
- And so much more.

SBHCs benefit everyone: When health care is accessed in schools, students benefit because they can establish a trusting relationship with health care providers right where they learn. Parents benefit because they don’t have to take a day off of work. Schools benefit because students spend more time in the classroom. And employers benefit because parents don’t have to miss a day of work.
Looking into our state’s future and having greater awareness of and a better understanding of the commonplace nature of **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)** (which are stressful or traumatic events including abuse, neglect and household dysfunction), SBHCs provide great value. Higher number of ACEs are associated with increased risk for depression, heart disease, liver disease, unhealthy substance use and other personal and public health issues. Without buffers like adequate adult support, these experiences can lead to children experiencing a toxic stress response which can even disrupt the development of the brain and other organs, and can increase the risk for stress-related disease and cognitive impairment well into adulthood. SBHCs are and need to continue to be one crucial player of support that can provide such a buffer, and support not only the healthy development of children but also the health of the adults, students grow into.

I urge you to protect our CT resident’s health and wellbeing from the very beginning, by supporting the essential and core services that School Based Health Centers provide. **Please maintain funding for SBHCs in our state so that our young people can continue to thrive, be healthy, and be able to learn in school. This is critical for their future and for the future of our state.**

*It is the right thing to do and it is the smart thing to do.*

Please contact me with any questions or comments you may have.

Thank you for supporting School Based Health Centers!

Genuinely,

_Daniela Giordano_