March 1, 2019

Appropriations Committee
Legislative Office Building
300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford CT 06106

H.B. 7148 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2021, and Making Appropriations Therefore

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

My name is Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin. I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Oral Health Initiative, a 501(c)3 nonprofit and the only entity in the state with the sole mission of increasing access to quality, affordable oral health services for all Connecticut residents. I am here to address the impact the proposed budget cut to School-Based Health Centers would have on Connecticut’s children. The proposed reduction of nearly $200,000 will reduce critical health services to the most vulnerable kids in the state.

I am here to highlight the adverse impact this cut would have on our children’s oral health and how that harm would translate to missed school days, lower school performance, and other health issues, such as diabetes, down the road.

Dental disease left untreated can adversely affect speech, nutrition, growth and function, social development, and quality of life.

- Dental decay remains the most common chronic condition among children. It is five times as common as asthma and seven times as common as hay fever.¹
- It is a preventable disease through daily care, drinking fluoridated water and interventions by health professionals.
- Dental and oral disease have been linked with ear and sinus infections, weakened immune systems, diabetes, heart and lung disease, cancer, and other chronic diseases.²
- Dental disease is associated with missing school and poor school performance³, as well as difficulty with eating, speaking, and playing.⁴
- Dental issues, particularly dental pain so harsh that children cannot focus or learn, account for 1/3 of elementary school children’s missed days of school and almost all of high school students missed days of school. Additionally, parents miss an average of 2.5 days of work a year to care for their children with dental problems.⁵
- In the most recent Every Smile Counts report, which is the report on Connecticut children’s oral health, about a third of surveyed children had dental decay. The numbers are higher among children of color and low-income children.⁶
Dental care access at School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) increases access to care.

- If properly funded, SBHCs can provide preventive care including oral health assessments, applying fluoride varnish, oral health education, and referral to a dental home.
- Although tooth decay is preventable, SBHCs need the right funding and overview to make sure this chronic condition does not go untreated.
- Budget cuts will result in reduced clinical staff hours, potential staff layoffs, early closures, and the health of vulnerable children will be comprised. As dental clinics can be more costly to operate than medical, they may be hit harder by cuts to funding. This is of significant concern, because untreated dental disease is the main reason kids miss school. When kids miss school, our education system suffers, teachers suffer, test scores suffer, parents miss work and pay, and kids miss out on important lessons.
- State funding allows SBHCs to operate in 92 schools in 22 communities, which only a third of them have dental clinics due to funding constraints. We should be striving to secure oral health services in all SBHCs, not cutting the funding for these vital programs.
- SBHCs bill HUSKY and private insurance whenever possible, yet reimbursements support only a percentage of operations. There are many barriers associated with billing for services that include: preventive and care coordination services that are not covered by insurance; high deductibles that must be met before services are reimbursed; limited visits on parent’s insurance plan; difficulty obtaining accurate insurance information; and lacking comprehensive dental insurance and therefore relying on SBHCs for dental treatments.

The Connecticut Oral Health Initiative asks you to restore funding for School-based Health Centers in the budget in order to improve the health and well-being of our students.

If we can be of any assistance, please contact us. Thank you for your time and your commitment to protect Connecticut’s children.

Sincerely,

Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin
Executive Director
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“Oral health for all”

1. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2821841/
5. https://dentistry.usc.edu/2012/08/10/poor-oral-health-can-mean-missed-school-lower-grades/