Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
March 1, 2019

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On Governor’s proposed Biennial Budget FY2020-21
H.B. 7148 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFORE

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

My name is Jessica Chan and I am a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner at the Winthrop Elementary School at Child and Family Agency. Our Agency operates 13 School-Based Health Centers in the communities in New London County, providing integrated medical and mental health services. I am submitting testimony on H.B. 7148, An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2021.

Previously, I worked in outpatient primary care pediatrics with limited time during appointments for teaching. I found that the majority of my time in the pediatric office was spent treating acute illness or complications that may have been preventable if there was enough time to fully educate families and focus on preventative efforts.

Working at Child and Family’s School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) has allowed me the flexibility to take the time to fully educate a child about their health and discuss care with the family. Being located in the school setting allows for very close follow-up and helps ensure better compliance with recommended treatments and availability to discuss any changes or concerns in the child’s status. One important aspect of the SBHCs through Child and Family Agency is our focus on asthma education and treatment in the school setting. Our clinics are located in urban settings and we treat many low-income families. It is widely known to pediatric providers that asthma rates are often higher in these environments; whether due to poor air quality or lack of resources to obtain treatment/medications. Our goal in SBHCs is to promote preventative asthma education before a child is symptomatic in order to prevent unnecessary emergency room visits which cost money to the families and the state.

I would like to share one visit from this school year that highlights the true importance of the SBHC in local communities. The school nurse called my office around 3:15 in the afternoon, shortly before dismissal, with an 8 year-old female who was having asthma symptoms and mild respiratory distress. Her oxygen levels were low and she stated feeling short of breath. In my SBHC, I was able to assess and treat her with two albuterol nebulizer treatments and a first dose of oral steroids. She was not able to go home on the bus, but I coordinated with school staff until her father was available to come pick her up and take her home. If she did not have access to a School-Based Health Center, she would have been transferred to the ED by ambulance. Since this visit, I have been able to see her a few times in clinic to review asthma symptoms, medications, and potential wheezing triggers. I was also able to sit down with her father and review her asthma action plan in hopes to avoid this from happening in the future. Both she and her family have reported a better understanding of her asthma symptoms,
diagnosis, and medications. This was earlier this school year and she has not been sent to my office in an asthma exacerbation since then. We also send our progress notes and review of asthma education provided to the patient’s community pediatric providers so that they are aware of asthma exacerbations and steps the SBHC took in asthma crisis.

This is just one case example out of dozens of visits per week that highlight the need to support the importance of school-based health centers in local communities: especially those who may not have the resources available to seek out medical care or navigate our health-care system without our support. **We are making a difference in the lives of children every day, not only in helping them manage chronic conditions like asthma, but in providing care to new families without health insurance, vaccines to the under-immunized, and those in need of both immediate and long-term mental health services.** Taking funding away from such a crucial program would be detrimental to the future health and success of these children in Connecticut.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jessica Chan, MSN, APRN, PNP-BC  
Pediatric Nurse Practitioner  
Child and Family Agency  
School-Based Health Center Program