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

My name is Rose-Ann T. Wanczyk-Karp, LCSW, BCD, DCSW, ACSW and I live in Cromwell, CT. I am writing as a clinical social worker in a Community Health Center Inc. School Based Health Center in Meriden CT. I work with children in grades kindergarten through fifth and their families. I provide individual, family and group therapy. I collaborate with teachers, school staff, physicians and nurses, as well as a host of community providers as needed, to secure integrated health service.

Please accept this testimony on the proposed biennial budget from the Governor. 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 happy, but many children have health problems that make it difficult for them to learn how to handle their emotional, academic and social challenges. One of my main concerns is with children’s anxiety due to the chronic stress they handle on a daily basis. Chronic stress has an impact on children’s brain and physical health, which if remained unchecked, can develop into adolescent and adult anxiety and depression. School Based Health Centers (SBHCs) are an effective, integrated and cost-effective way to help young children with their health challenges. Supporting students with their health challenges where they spend most of their waking hours during the
week – right in schools – also contributes to keeping them focused on learning in classrooms, paying better attention, learning how to have the power to handle difficult emotional situations with improved self-regulation, developing healthy relationships with peers, improve their school attendance and become a happier child.

Many of our parents appreciate that they do not have to provide transportation for their child to get help. Some do not have cars and face financial burdens on a daily basis. In SBHC, the children see me daily in school even though our actual appointments may be once or twice a week. They stop by in the morning to say good-morning or wave when we meet in the hallway or cafeteria. Teachers can provide up to date classroom performance information as needed. If one of my clients complain about a physical issue, I bring them to see the school nurse.

I recently began with a third grade student who was out of control in class, requiring several staff to come at once to take the child out of the classroom. When stressed, running out of the classroom was the child’s main relief, causing alarm for the teacher, the rest of the class and the student. The other alternative was to trash the classroom, sending the rest to the hallway for safety. In our work together, I learned what was causing the stress, ie which academic subject was difficult and how the child thought parents were responding. Then parental sessions examined why parental interventions were contributing to the escalations of the child in the classroom. Parents also found relief by not continuing with the old, but changing to new interventions. The child stopped running out of the class or trashing the classroom, uses mindful breathing techniques instead to calm down. The student now accepts that no one is perfect and that is ok. A behavioral check sheet is used in class which provides self-monitoring of progress and a quick response to behavioral choices. “This is the first time I have done well.”

I seek reimbursement for as many services as I can and rely on state funding to support uninsured and underinsured children, or those with very high deductibles.

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!