Written Testimony to Appropriations Committee Health Subcommittee

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Sabrina Trocchi and I am the Chief Operating Officer of Wheeler Clinic, Inc. Wheeler Clinic is a comprehensive provider of integrated primary, behavioral health and dental care to over 30,000 medically underserved and vulnerable children, families, and adults in communities across Connecticut. As a federally qualified health center, Wheeler offers cost-effective integrated care aimed at improving health outcomes and the care experience of individuals served, while containing the growth of health care costs by reducing unnecessary utilization of resource-intensive services. Please accept my written testimony on H.B. 7148 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium ending June 30, 2021.

Specific to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), I support the Governor’s proposal to convert state-operated DMHAS services to the nonprofit sector, for savings of $2.3 mm in the first year and $4.3 mm for FY 20-21. I urge you to go further than his proposal to save more money by converting more services and reinvesting the savings into the service delivery system. You can maximize limited state funding by shifting more expensive state-operated programs into the community. Community nonprofits can reduce state costs and meet the demand for services if you first take the necessary steps.

I oppose the Governor’s proposal to cut $2 million from the “Grants for Mental Health” and “Grants for Substance Abuse” line items. These grants pay for care for individuals who are uninsured, underinsured or experience gaps in coverage. Grant funding from DMHAS is essential to cover the costs incurred by providers. It is a fallacy that ACA has eliminated or decreased the number of individuals who are uninsured. Alternatively, it has increased the number of individuals who are underinsured and who cannot afford to pay for high-eductibles and/or high-copays. At Wheeler we continue to see growth in uninsured patients, in addition to underinsured patients who cannot pay for out-of-pocket expenses. Today, approximately 8% of individuals served at Wheeler are uninsured.

In reference to the Department of Public Health budget, I oppose the Governor’s proposal to cut an additional $645,135 from School Based Health Centers. School Based Health Centers are part of the essential system of care for children and adolescents, providing physical, mental health, and oral health services to over 44,000 students in Connecticut. Proposed cuts to School Based Health Centers would mean thousands of children will receive fewer direct medical and mental health services provided to them in an accessible way – within their schools.

Thank you for this opportunity to be heard. I am happy to answer any questions that you have.

Sincerely,

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