

Public Health Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1161

AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCHOOL-BASED

Title: HEALTH CENTER EXPANSION WORKING GROUP.

Vote Date: 3/10/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/6/2023

File No.: 178

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Public Health Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

School-based health centers play a vital role in addressing the medical and mental health needs of young people. It is not surprising that providing these services has proven to be very beneficial as healthy children are better learners.

This bill would require the Department of Public Health (DPH), in fiscal year 2023, to expand a grant program to certain School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) to enhance their facilities as well as the services they provide. This expanded grant program will be in effect through the end of fiscal year 2024. DPH is also required to give priority to the 124 schools addressed in the final report of the School Based Health Center Expansion Working Group released last year, as well as 36 additional sites recommended for expanded mental health services outlined in the same report.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Melanie Wilde-Lane, Executive Director, CT Association of School-Based Health Centers, (CASBHC):

CASBHC is a statewide organization supporting 130 fully comprehensive school-based health centers offering services within the school setting while also supporting approximately 150 expanded school health sites offering single services. A working group had been put in

place to study school-based health centers and submitted its recommendations over a year ago. However, much has changed since then and what were determined to be the high need areas last year have increased. CASBHC supports this bill and requests that the committee consider expanding this grant opportunity to include all districts interested in opening a school-based health center. Services should be expanded to include medical, mental and dental health, as well as an expansion of staffing and hours of operation. With the increasing need, any district that can provide data to show there is a demand should not be excluded from this funding opportunity.

Yvette Highsmith-Francis, Vice President, Community Health Center, Inc. (CHC):

CHC has been a trusted provider of school-based health care statewide for nearly 30 years addressing the needs of more than 17,000 children in 180 school-based health centers. CHC has been available to students who need continued care during the summer months and has been there for school districts during the worst of circumstances, including suicides and shootings. School-based health centers break down barriers to behavioral health care for young people either in the school setting or through telehealth. It is essential to expand services to schools currently without a health center to be able to provide these services and on-going screening to our most vulnerable and at-risk communities.

Kimberly Beauregard LCSW, President and CEO, InterCommunity Health Care:

InterCommunity Health Care operates 10 school-based health centers within East Hartford and Manchester public schools serving 2800 students. SBHCs continue to serve many uninsured/underinsured students and students of undocumented status. In 2021, 22% of SBHC clients were uninsured and 65% were insured through Medicaid. InterCommunity urges the Committee to ensure funds to support SBHC continue into the next biennium and in future fiscal years and that the funding is available before the start of the school year. Significant delays in payment mean our organizations have had to use operating dollars to pay staff and continue to provide services.

Roberta Friedman:

Ms. Friedman is particularly concerned that children have better access to oral health care. Oral health is a key component of a child's overall health yet it is often overlooked. As the result of the work of the Connecticut Oral Health Initiative, we know that dental decay is a public health problem for at least 1/3 of Connecticut's children and disproportionately impacts Black, Hispanic, Asian and multiracial children and those from lower income households. Ms. Friedman urged that the bill include funding for dental health services.

**TJ Clarke II, MBA, Executive Director of the CT Oral Health Initiative (COHI)
Allen Hindin, DDS, MPH, Connecticut Licensed General Dentist
submitted testimony in support of oral health services in SBHCs.**

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Linda Dalessio, APRN:

Ms. Dalessio believes that health care does not belong in schools. Education belongs in schools. If the state wishes to fund health clinics, they should be free-standing and independently run clinics.

Reported by: Kathleen Panazza

Date: March 23, 2023

