



NASW

National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut Chapter

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Testimony on H.B. 5005: An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending
June 30, 2021

Appropriations Committee
Department of Public Health Budget
February 21, 2020

Submitted by: Stephen Wanczyk-Karp, LMSW

The National Association of Social Workers, CT supports the Governor's proposed budget increase of \$125,152 in the Department of Public Health's budget for school-based health clinics. We also ask that the Appropriations Committee further increase the funding to the degree feasible. SBHC's are a proven effective service system that provides physical, mental and in some clinics dental care to children who would otherwise go without health care services. Programs that are working as intended and include preventative measures that save the state dollars should be funded to the maximum possible amount available.

According to the National Mental Health Association, less than 1 in 5 of the 12.5 million children in need of mental health services actually receive them. Many of these children will not achieve academic success due to social, emotional and behavioral problems affecting school performance. SBHC's help these students through means of prevention, early identification, intervention, counseling and support. Especially in both urban and rural communities where many families do not have access to affordable mental health care it is the SBHC's clinical social worker or other mental health provider that meets the child's mental health needs. Approximately 50% of all services provided in SBHCs are for behavioral health.

For many students the SBHC is the only health and mental health service available to them. Comprehensive SBHC's offer mental health treatment, address acute conditions, provide preventive medical exams, treat injuries, offer oral health care, provide follow-up on chronic conditions and offer health education. Other SBHCs are mental health focused, working with children to cope with the stresses and behavioral issues that impede their ability to learn within the classroom setting. These are services that benefit the student, the student's family, teachers and the school system by having a healthier student body. An increase in funding will go a long way toward meeting the community needs of students, many of whom are from low income households.

Schools do not function in a vacuum. When students cross that school door they bring with them the life stresses of their family, impacts of poverty, trauma of witnessing

violence, fears of being bullied, chronic and acute health problems, and in this economy where so many families are struggling to get by all of the concerns that a student's family faces press on the student's mind. All of these factors are obstacles to learning. All of these obstacles are brought into the classroom. The medical and behavioral staff of SBHC's breaks through these barriers by providing students with a safe place to seek care within the school. This in turn allows students to return to the classroom ready to be productive in their educational learning.

School based health clinics support student health and student learning. They enhance the funds spent on education by assisting students to succeed in school. We strongly urge that at minimum the Governor's proposed budget be supported and preferably increased.