

S.B. 1 AN ACT EQUALIZING COMPREHENSIVE ACCESS TO MENTAL, BEHAVIORAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH CARE IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

Good Day Senator, Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Anwar, Senator Kushner, Representative Gilchrest, Senator Hwang, Senator Somers, and Honorable Members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is , Megan Donnelly, LCSW and I am writing to you as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker from the Charles H. Barrows STEM Academy. I have worked at the School Based Health Center for eight years, and have never seen the drastic need for our health center like this year. As the clinical social worker at a School Based Health Center for grades Kindergarten through eighth grade, I have been able to witness the vast changes that the pandemic has had on a broad range of ages.

The pandemic has impacted families greatly, in many different ways. In an already impoverished area, we have seen great financial needs including food, clothing, school supplies, etc. Our community has done an amazing job offering programs for these families and our School Based Health Center has been able to aid in advocating needs and providing resources and support for these families.

Beyond material items, our children's mental health has been deeply impacted this year due to COVID. The isolation, lack of sports/gatherings/activities, school environment changes, increased worries, and traumatic experiences have had a major impact on our children and adolescents. Each student and family is battling their own struggles on a daily basis, but this year has increased those struggles.

The national news has shown how impacted our children are, as well as the lack of providers to service these children/adolescents. The School Based Health Centers have been a vital program in our community for this reason prior to the pandemic, but now it is more important than ever.

Our mental health services need to be appreciated and acknowledged as a vital part of our communities and children's lives. We are here to provide opportunities for our families to have access to programs that are needed and beneficial. Being in the school, we can identify and help children that might not have ever been referred to an outside provider and received the help they need.

I appreciate the opportunity to present written testimony and look forward to helping with the ongoing battle that COVID has left us in.

Kindly,

Megan Donnelly, LCSW