



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 Dana Schmitt; I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and a School Based Behavioral Health Clinician of School-Based Health Services for the Community Health Center, Inc. I would like to thank you for allowing me the time to speak today. I believe in briefly sharing with you quotes from students and a parent about how valuable and necessary School Based Health Centers are it will provide evidence to contribute to the need for the SB1 An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic.

I have worked as a therapist in the state of Connecticut since 2003. I have a deeply invested in the work I provide to children, adolescents, and families who are part of our underserved communities. It has been apparent in my years of service that these adolescent, children, and families will not enter nor have the time or capability to enter the typical counseling office. The barriers of access, location, cost, transportation, and social stigma about therapy has caused many to not receive the care that they rightfully and desperately need. I have witnessed and been a part of providing quality care in schools where we are addressing disparities in opportunity and providing access to care that otherwise would not be there for the adolescents and children to have support, learn the tools they need to heal and grow.

Today I would like to share several quotes from students and one parent who I work with in the Bethel Public High School. I chose to state in their words the importance of school based health centers.

From a junior female student, "I like the fact that we can do telehealth sessions around my school schedule and when I come back to school I will have you to go to when I have panic attacks. I am really anxious when I am in the school regularly, but wearing a mask makes me feel even uglier and insecure. I am really glad that you are in the school when I do go full-time so that I can have you to come to as my support."

Parent of a freshman boy said to me yesterday as we were setting up the intake appointment, "I am so glad that there is a therapist in the school because I do not know how to pick anyone from like psychology today or how I would select someone from my long list of clinicians from my insurance company. I am happy that this service is in the school and it makes it easier for my son to be seen."

A junior female, "This has helped me a lot during the pandemic in multiple ways. The most valuable thing about having sessions is it feels like I have a safe space to let go all of my feelings to a friend. It doesn't feel like I'm being forced to talk to an adult, it feels like I'm talking to one of my lifelong friends."

Tenth grade student, "I am very grateful to have my therapist, she has helped me with my anxiety so much in ways she might not even know. I look so forward to our sessions to talk about my week. It feels so good

not to have to rely on a pill thanks to her. Her listening and providing techniques has helped me so much. I'm very grateful to be able to have video sessions too and pray our sessions continue."

From an 18 year old junior autistic female student I see you has many problems with understanding her world around her stated when I asked about how she felt from our sessions that, "I feel better about myself. I am able to relax and be more calm. I was able to get through hard times this year." Referring to the distance learning.

From a sophomore student who came to the school last year after her family decided to move from New York City. "I had a lot of underlying things that I needed to work on as far as my expression of emotion, lack of socialization, anxiety, and depression. The pandemic and the school in NYC didn't help with these feelings either considering the amount of stress that I went through, however, therapy has helped me to open up more than I would have without it. I have been able to put myself in situations I am not necessarily comfortable with just yet, an example being talking to new people first or writing emotions that I feel down on a piece of paper and try to find what was the root of the emotion. I have a hard time trusting, and still do, however, Dana has been helping me to battle my issues one at a time.

These are some of the many lives of adolescents and families who are receiving access to care through school based health centers. Thank you for being a part of providing this opportunity to so many children across Connecticut.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to share real life examples and for your time listening.