

Public Testimony

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 Gilcrest, Senator Hwang, Senator Somers, and Honorable Members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Lynne Weeks. I am writing to you as a Member of the CT Association of School-Based Health Centers and as the Coordinator and Manager of the three SBHC's in the Windham Public Schools.

I am appreciative of the opportunity to provide written testimony on S. B. 1, An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic.

As our students are finally returning to a nearly full-time schedule in Windham, we are already seeing the impact of the past year. The adjustment back to the school building has mentally impacted many students, particularly at the elementary level. The adjustment is different than just coming back in from summer vacation. Most of these students had no social interaction with others as is typical during vacation periods. Also the isolation of our most vulnerable population presents us with new challenges. For many of our students, particularly those who deal with severe trauma, the Pandemic has kept them within the environment from which their trauma often stems. Their inability to find private spaces during this time to stay in touch with our mental health clinicians was very real and sadly, their care was severely affected. In Windham, it was not the inability to access technology...that was available. It was privacy they needed to communicate their needs and issues to the clinicians that became impossible. So now, they are back in school and their trauma has done nothing but intensify.

Here is where School-Based Health Centers are able to have such a great impact on students. Regardless of barriers such as a lack of transportation, cultural beliefs regarding seeking mental health assistance or lack of time due to work outside of their school day, SBHC's are there....all day, every day to assist students. The School-Based Health Center is unique in our ability to be where students spend hours of their day.

The passage of S. B. 1 would potentially allow Windham to offer more services to our very needy population. At present, none of the four elementary schools even have SBHC services. The additional funding might allow us to bring on more behavioral health staff to service this large population of Kindergarten through fifth grade students. The tax dollars that would support this Act would have a direct impact on Windham's and CT's youth. I can't help but

believe that spending these dollars now will have a significant positive affect on what will happen in their lives in the years to come.

In closing, I am hopeful that the CT Legislature will see the benefit of adding additional support directly to School-Based Health Centers. We are change-makers in these students' lives.

Thank you for your time today and every day.