

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 Melanie Wilde-Lane , I am writing to you as the Vice President of The CT Association of School Based Health Centers, and as Program Director for three School Based Health Center sites located in Branford, all operated by the Branford Board of Education.

I appreciate the opportunity to present written testimony on *SBI An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral ad Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic*.

- Why is the SBHC important
 - Ultimately we reduce barriers to healthcare such as lack of transportation, copays and high deductibles, no insurance/underinsured, cannot take time off from work.
 - Ultimately, we keep kids healthy and in school and out of the Emergency Rooms.
- How did the SBHC help me during COVID 19?
 - We provided a sense of security to our families. When they had questions, we had answers. When they had nowhere to turn or did not know where to turn, SBHC's stepped in and leant a hand. That may have meant, we provided some basic information, answered questions, provide an opportunity for a covid test, and offered follow up telehealth care during quarantine as well as written documentation to return to school.
 - We also provided Mental Health services including individual and family therapy during this entire time. Services never stopped. Telehealth visits have opened up a world that has supported continued and new mental health support needs.
 - We continued to meet with support staff and administrators and as rules and regulations changed, the SBHC was fluid in that movement all while continuing to meet the needs of students and their families.
- What would students have done during COVID 19 is the SBHC wasn't available?
 - Urgent Care and ER's would have been infiltrated with students needing support.
 - Not received services, both medical and mental health
 - It has always been our hope that we close gaps and fill in the cracks. No child should fall through either and when working with the teams at the district and school levels, the SBHC has been successful in providing support when a student and/or family needs it with little to no wait time, with no run around, with no chasing down and making multiple phone calls. The SBHC's have saved lives. Students will tell you that if my SBHC staff had not been accessible to me, I would have done X, Y or Z and that's a scary statement. But SBHC's never left any student behind. We have worked tirelessly through Covid and will continue to work tirelessly to ensure that no child suffers another day without care, that no family goes with unanswered questions, that no student feels unsupported or doesn't have a "PERSON" to go to.