

February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Testimony for H.B. No. 6439 (COMM) An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefor.

**Governor's Proposed 2022-2023 Budget for Health Agencies**

Dear Senator Abrams, Rep. Dillon Senator Somers, Rep. Kennedy and Members of the Health Sub-Committee,

My name is Aymi Bennhoff, APRN and I am a Family Nurse Practitioner, and Program Manager for SBHC Medical Services for Child and Family Agency. I am writing to you today **for continued and increased funding for the School-Based Health Center (SBHC) safety-net in Connecticut.**

The essential role that SBHCs play in providing mental and medical healthcare services for children has never been more evident to me than during these times of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has long been recognized that racial and socioeconomic disparities exist for many children in CT, but these have widened during this unprecedented time, and many children are at risk of “falling through the cracks” due to isolation and less time at school, and indeed are already falling though. I believe we will see the repercussions of this for years to come.

I view SBHCs as uniquely situated to roll out widespread screening to assess for those things that contribute to health (or lack thereof) such as nutrition, exercise habits, sleep, healthy relationships, adverse childhood experiences, mental health, and social determinants of health. Having the time to address these in a primary care office setting can be challenging, as well as having access to children on a wide-scale basis, as pediatricians are dependent on parents bringing children in for their yearly physicals. Especially now, when parents are stretched very thin with their dual roles of working and managing their children’s education at home, it is easy for prevention to fall through the cracks.

In addition, many insurance companies do not reimburse much for preventative services beyond a yearly physical and immunizations. Time taken for discussion of lifestyle factors indispensable to health: nutrition, sleep, activity, and mental health are often paid at a much lower rate (or are non-reimbursable) than are visits for acute issues. This highlights the importance of receiving funds from the state to bridge this gap of care in the SBHCs.

I believe that SBHCs can work very collaboratively with the pediatricians in the community, to provide the screening and health teaching that children need, and communicate to pediatricians’ relevant findings so that partnerships can be strengthened on behalf of the children. There are overlapping yet distinct roles that each play in delivering quality healthcare for children.

It is for these reasons (among others) that I write today to ask for continued--and increased--funding for SBHCs for CT children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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