



CONNECTICUT INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITIES, INC. SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CENTERS

“HEALTHY KIDS MAKE BETTER LEARNERS”

Testimony

Governor's Proposed 2022-2023 Budget for Health Agencies

H.B. No. 6439 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

Good Day Honorable Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Mary Abrams, Representative Pat Dillon, Senator Heather Somers, Representative Kathy Kennedy, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Melanie Bonjour, and I am the current President of The CT Association of School Based Health Centers as well as Program Manager for six School Based Health Center sites located in Danbury and Newtown, all operated by the Connecticut Institute For Communities, Inc. Greater Danbury Community Health Center, a Federally Qualified Health Center.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in response to the Governor's proposed 2022-2023 budget for health agencies, specifically the Department of Public Health line item for School-Based Health Centers.

SBHCs have been providing comprehensive medical, behavioral health and oral health services to on school grounds since the late 1980's. Designed to increase access to critical health care services through the removal of reported barriers to care, including but not limited to inability to pay for care, lack of insurance, provider shortage areas, limited or no transportation, limited culturally competent providers, and concerns about confidentiality, the SBHCs established in the late 80's, early 90's were predominately located in the larger cities, where poverty rates were higher than other communities, and where easily accessible and affordable health care services were available, such as the City of New Haven and City of Hartford.

Since then, this highly successful health care delivery model expanded to other areas of the state, including not only larger cities and school districts, but in rural and suburban communities, including the Newtown, where a SBHC was established to respond to what was anticipated as the need for the availability of long term mental health care services following the Sandy Hook tragedy.

While the SBHCs provide a range of services, including medical care for acute and chronic illness, well-child visits, school required vaccines, anticipatory guidance, and health education, during the last decade, the SBHCs have experienced a substantial increase in requests for mental health related services, making mental health care the top reason for visits across all locations. Students have reported to the SBHCs with anxiety, depressed mood, suicidal ideation and or reported suicide attempt, harmful behaviors, including substance use and abuse and feelings of loss, loneliness, and separation.

In 2018, a CT Department of Public Health 9th to 12th Grade Youth Risk Surveillance Survey noted the following:

Felt Sad or Hopeless –30.6% (more than 1 in 3)of students felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities (past 12 mos.) (*Linear increase over 10 years from 25% in 2009, but no statistical change*)

Adult support-36.5% (more than 1 in 3) of high school students reported that they could not identify even one teacher or other adult in their school to talk to if they have a problem (*No change over 10 years from 36.2% in 2009*)

Get the Help They Need When Feeling Sad, Empty, Hopeless, Angry, or Anxious – Only 24.1% (about 1 in 4) of students most of the time or always get the kind of help they need when they feel sad, empty, hopeless, angry, or anxious. (*Linear decrease over 10 years from 44.1% in 2009, but no statistical change*)

Alarming findings, to say the least.

In the Spring of each school year, CT SBHCs conduct annual student satisfaction surveys to assess the student's overall satisfaction of the services received at the health centers. One question asks the student to respond to the following question: "*What would you do about your health care concern if the SBHC wasn't there?*"

Analysis of student satisfaction survey results from the 2019 school year indicated that of the total respondents to the survey question, 46% visited the SBHC for mental health related concerns. Of this number, 49% reported that they would "*do nothing*" about their problem, or "*wait until their problem got worse*". One can conclude that doing nothing about and mental health problem or waiting until it got worse could likely lead to devastating outcomes.

SBHCs The COVID 19 pandemic has only added to this very serious health care crisis. With schools moving to a remote learning model, social emotional learning has been negatively impacted, as students were separated from interaction with their peers, a traditional classroom schedule and a controlled learning environment.

COVID-19 impact: CT suicide was down 17% among adults 18+ Jan.-Oct. 2020 compared to 2015-19; however, youth suicide did not change. CT lost 10 youth age 17 and under to suicide in 2020, with four suicide completions 4 in October alone.

A top legislative priority of the CT Association of School Based Health Centers, Inc. is to not only protect the Department of Public Health line item for School Based Health Center services, but to increase funding to support expansion of School-Based Health Center comprehensive services, as well as to allow for the an increase in school-based mental health services, especially in parts of the state that have a significant professional health care shortage, including the northeast and northwest corners of the state.

I thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully Submitted,

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