



Testimony of the Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers in Support of
**H.B. 6439 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 13th, 2023
and Making Appropriations Therefor.**

Governor's Proposed 2022-2023 Budget for Health Agencies

Senator Abrams, Rep. Steinberg, Senator Somers, Senator Hwang, Rep. Petit, Rep. Gilchrest
and Members of the Committee,

My name is Laurie Collins, and I am the Association Director for the Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers. I am here today to thank the governor for the continued support of the SBHCs, and to ask the committee to strongly consider increasing funding for the School-Based Health Centers in Connecticut.

School Based Health Centers in 22 communities across the state serve as the main point of contact for nearly 40,000 children to obtain medical, mental health and dental care. For so many young people, SBHCs have become a lifeline for them to access services quickly, and easily, regardless of their ability to pay. For a child, building a strong relationship, in a safe environment, with a trusted adult can change their life. More importantly, building that connection with a licensed professional at the SBHC that exists right in the school can, and has, changed the trajectory of the life of a child who is struggling with illnesses like anxiety and depression. SBHCs keep children out of emergency rooms, healthy and able to participate in their learning.

Throughout the past year, SBHCs were able respond to unique circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic, like the transition to remote and hybrid learning in schools, with innovative practices that enabled them to continue to provide care to students safely. SBHCs developed vaccination drive thru clinics to ensure immunization schedules were kept, performed aggressive outreach to at-risk students to keep them connected and provided on-site COVID 19 rapid testing, to name a few strategies. For many students, they would not have been able to attend school or manage the transitions from in-person to remote and back to in-person learning without the SBHC support. The new stressors in children's lives created by this pandemic will continue to affect their physical and mental health for years to come. SBHCs are ready to provide the care they will need.

One thing that the pandemic has continued to highlight for us is that communities without SBHCs have a disadvantage. Children have much more limited access to healthcare and mental health providers because parents must take time from work to bring children to medical

offices. It is well cited in the literature that when access to care is limited, preventative care is often deprioritized, and health outcomes worsen over time.

The CT Association of School Based Health Centers strongly believes that healthy kids make healthy learners. Providing medical, dental, and mental health services on site at schools contributes greatly to physical and mental health of the students, and the community. For this reason, we are grateful that the Governor's Proposed 2022-2023 Budget for Health Agencies **maintains the funding level for SBHCs, and we strongly urge the committee to consider increasing the funding for SBHCs, to allow for new SBHCs to be implemented in other communities that lack resources.**

Please contact me if I can be of any assistance. I may be reached by email at lauriecollins@ctschoolhealth.org or by phone at 203-230-9976. Thank you for your time and commitment to Connecticut's children.