

March 1, 2021

Testimony regarding H.B. No. 6509 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH CLINICS

Dear Senator Anwar, Senator Bradley, Representative Linehan, Representative Welander, and members of the Committee on Children,

My name is Erin Patterson Janicek and I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and a Senior Director of Clinical Services for Child & Family Agency of Southeastern CT (CFA), where I oversee the operations of 13 integrated School-Based Health Centers (SBHC) in New London, Groton, Waterford, and Stonington. I am also a Board of Directors member for the Connecticut Association of School-Based Health Centers (CASBHC).

As a School-Based Health Center mental health clinician and now administrator, I can share that SBHCs provide barrier free mental health service—allowing students to receive counseling without worry about transportation, lengthy wait times, or insurance coverage. Care is provided in the child’s familiar environment, and working parents can access important services for their child without missing valuable work time and wages. An added benefit of SBHC mental health services is that it allows for “in-vivo” care—having your therapist work with you live while you’re in the midst of a panic attack is much different than recalling the panic attack in an outpatient office a few days later. Also, as a bridge between the school and the family, School-Based Health Centers help assure a child’s needs are met and they are available to learn when in the classroom. Lastly, SBHCs offer services of the highest quality, adhering to state and federal standards and utilizing best-practices.

As CFA’s School-Based Health Centers are integrated—providing both physical and mental health care—I would also add that I believe that this model offers the best care for our students. Research shows the inextricable link between our children’s physical and mental health, particularly related to trauma and chronic stress. This link is especially important as we manage the health ramifications—now and in the years to come—caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Integrated SBHC care assures that a child who shows up weekly with a stomach ache can have physiological causes assessed with the recognition that the underlying issue may be linked to anxiety or other mental health concerns—and with the expertise next door to manage those needs. A Nurse Practitioner having the capacity to introduce and warmly “hand off” a child to their trusted mental health clinician colleague—whose face is already friendly and familiar from around the school building-- is a hallmark of SBHC care. We also know that these systems working together have decades of evidence on improving health-related pediatric outcomes. Lastly, as risk assessments and mental health screening becomes standard across primary care medical settings, the SBHC integrated model of collaborative medical and mental health services assures a timely and cohesive response to these students in need.

In closing, School-Based Health Centers are in the prime position to deliver both medical and mental health services, and have a proven wrap around delivery model involving the school – the parents – the primary care providers- the community – and the child. Please support the growth of School-Based Health Centers in Connecticut, until we have this efficient, integrated, and cost-effective services in every school building across the state.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Erin Patterson Janicek, LCSW

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