



Sen. Osten, Rep. Walker, Sen. Miner, Rep. France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Katelyn Warner and I am a Licensed Professional Counselor and a Regional Director of School-Based Health Services for the Community Health Center, Inc.

I would like to thank you for allowing me the time to submit these comments today in support of increasing the Governor's Proposed 2022-2023 Budget for Health Agencies (H.B. 6439) and the line item for School Based Health Care.

Personally, my passion as a therapist has always been to work with children in underserved communities. Often times these children will not enter the typical counseling office. The barriers of access, location, cost, transportation, and social stigma around attending therapy prevent these children from getting the care that they really need. By providing quality care in schools, we are addressing disparities in opportunity and opening the door for children, regardless of zip code, to learn, heal, and grow.

An example of the children we help is with a girl enrolled in one of our programs. I chose her story not only because she is precious to me but also because she is a clear picture of the importance of school based health centers.



This fifth grade girl is sweet, kind, funny, very often misunderstood, and deeply hurting. A grandparent, who is doing her best to juggle working and raising five grandkids, is her primary caregiver. Her parents, while alive, continue to make choices that do not allow them to parent. When she first started therapy, she was acting out at home and school, was very angry, had few friends, failing classes, and was severely depressed. She could not regulate her emotions as that is a skill learned through a bond with a trusting adult and she did not have one.

Despite this, our program work has begun to identify and express her emotions instead of burying them deep inside. She is advocating for her needs and building resilience. She is looking at how she sees herself, her family, and the impact that has on her identity and choices. She is addressing past unhealthy habits she used to feel loved and adopting new ways to handle her pain at the age of 11. As Fredrick Douglas said, “It’s easier to build strong children than repair broken men.”

I asked her last week to write down what having access to counseling in school has meant to her. I am going to share that with you even though, if I am



being honest, it feels awkward for me to read, as she is very generous in her words about me.

“My therapist makes my life so much better. She is like the mother I never had. She is fun, caring, sweet, kind, makes me laugh, and makes me feel loved. I know she loves me a lot but she sure cannot dance! I have grown so much in the last year and a half and I would not have been able to without this. Having therapy in school helps me and my grandma as she could not afford the gas to get me to a counselor.”

She is just one of the many lives of children are being changed through school based health centers. Thank you for being a part of providing this opportunity to so many children across Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Katelyn Warner, LPC

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