

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

My name is Melanie Wilde-Lane and I am the Director of School Based Health from Branford. I am writing today to thank you and the leadership of the Appropriations Committee for your continued strong support and commitment to SBHC's. I would also like to thank the Governor for his support as well. I am writing in support of HB 6439.

On March 13, 2020, we faced a pandemic head on. Schools closed on that day with little to no warning and the School Based Health Center's needed to think fast and act quicker, because on that day our district had every student headed home not knowing what was coming next. Our SBHC clinics in particular were not lucky enough to have had experience with telehealth or even be set up for telehealth. While we waited for our larger mother agency to put telehealth in place, which was no easy feat, our providers moved to using cellular devices and home phones to check in on our most vulnerable populations. It took a few weeks for all of our mental health therapists to be set up with devices that would allow for telehealth and they were off and running. Not only did we provide individual therapy to our students but we were able to provide comprehensive family therapy due to the immediate access we had to our families.

Almost a year later, we are in a hybrid state in our district and we continue to use telehealth services to reach our students and families. Why, you ask, when they are in school at least two days a week, because those two days are completely dedicated to academic work and our SBHC staff bend and flex to meet the needs of students. We work around school schedules to ensure that students are in class and learning. Many of our visits take place around major academic schedules and telehealth has allowed that to happen. Our students need us more than ever. Many are suffering from mild to severe anxiety, depression, school phobia and social anxiety. Students are worried now more than ever. They have suffered huge losses within the family structure that are Covid related, be it the loss of family income, housing, transportation, food security, and/or family members. They have lost their social structures, been

unable to socialize with family and friends. Students are spending hours in front of some sort of screen. When we return to school full time, students will exhibit even more anxiety and phobia and now more than ever, we need mental health professionals as well as medical professionals to help be the eyes and ears of all of these students. We need to ensure no one falls through the cracks, that anyone that needs help is recognized and provided the support they deserve.

When DPH provides you with our data, do not be fooled by the numbers you see. We cannot in any way compare this data and the number of visits to any other year. There is no comparison. For Branford, we were able to provide mental health services following the March 13th closure, but we were unable to provide medical services. You'll hear that many of our main site organizations had no choice but to mobilize all medical personnel to be on hand for Covid testing, coverage within the hospitals, and call lines. Each SBHC site, chomped at the bit to be able to return to the work we love as fast as we were able to. Once telehealth became available for all providers, we were back to work.

When considering the budget, please consider not just stabilizing the support the state provides to School Based Health Centers, but in fact increasing that award so that we are able to expand our staffing and our sites to meet the needs of each and every one of our students. Students will come back anxious and afraid and SBHC's are where many of those student's land and openly discuss those fears because of the relationships they have built with us. Now is not the time to cut back on us, but to forge ahead and provide more funding to us so that we can ensure that no child is left without medical and mental health services.

Respectfully submitted,

Melanie Wilde-Lane

Director of Branford's School Based Health Centers