

Testimony Regarding
HB 6350: An Act Concerning the Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2015 and Other Provisions Relating to Revenue, and
SB 848: An Act Implementing Provisions of the Budget Concerning Public Health
Sharon Langer, J.D., and Sarah Esty
Appropriations Committee
February 15, 2013

Dear Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee,

We are testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

We oppose the provisions in the Governor's proposed budget for FY 14-FY 15 that cancel the planned School-Based Health Center expansion and cut funding to existing School-Based Health Centers by \$0.47 million (5%) in FY 14 and \$0.62 million (6%) in FY 15.

These cuts will impede the ability of existing health centers to provide services to the children in their schools, and prevent children in as many as twenty of the highest-need schools from accessing necessary physical and mental health services (which they would have received as a result of the expansion). The expansion of school-based health centers in the education reform package last year indicated a strong understanding of the importance of addressing the holistic needs of children within school settings, including mental and physical health, to children's successful development. We are disappointed to see the Governor's budget undermining this commitment, and we hope the legislature will restore these funds.

We are particularly concerned about this cut's impact on mental health care access. Nearly half of young people are currently experiencing, or will in their life-times experience, a mental disorder, and one in five will experience a seriously debilitating mental illness.¹ Yet it is estimated that only about half the children who need mental health care receive it.² Schools are a critical part of the mental health care delivery system, providing approximately 70-80% of mental health services received by children in Connecticut. School Based Health Centers provide individual, group and family counseling for mental health issues in more than 40,000 visits on a yearly basis.³ Offering services in schools can both reduce stigma and facilitate access, getting more services to hard-to-reach populations.

¹ Merikangas KR, He J, Burstein M, Swanson SA, Avenevoli S, Sui L, Benjet C, Georgiades K, Swendsen J. "Lifetime Prevalence of Mental Disorders in U.S. Adolescents: Results from the National Comorbidity Study-Adolescent Supplement (NCS-A)." *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 10 (Oct 2010) : 980-989, available at: http://www.nimh.nih.gov/statistics/1ANYDIS_CHILD.shtml

² Merikangas KR, He JP, Brody D, Fisher PW, Bourdon K, Koretz DS. Prevalence and treatment of mental disorders among US children in the 2001-2004 NHANES. *Pediatrics*. 2010, 125(1):75-81, available at: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/statistics/1NHANES.shtml>

³ "Protecting the Health of Connecticut's Young People," *Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers*, (October 2010), available at: <http://www.ctschoolhealth.org/Announcements/view.asp?id=54>

Unaddressed health problems prevent children from learning, and the problems grow greater the longer they remain untreated. Early intervention is an important investment for the state to make. It creates better outcomes for children and provides significant cost savings in the long run due to improved health and decreased usage of high cost emergency interventions, such as hospitalization and residential treatment.

In sum, we urge the Appropriations Committee to reverse the proposed cuts to School Based Health Centers and reinstate the expansion into new Alliance District schools.