



Testimony Opposing Reduced Appropriations for the Departments of Public Health and Mental Health and Addiction Services

H.B. 7027, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2019, and Making Appropriations Thereof
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Appropriations Committee
February 23, 2017

Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Ziobron, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am the Advocacy Director of Connecticut Voices Children, a research-based child advocacy organization working to ensure that all Connecticut children have an equitable opportunity to achieve their full potential.

I am also a chair of the Connecticut Behavioral Health Partnership Oversight Council and have been a member of the Council since its inception over a decade ago. The Council advises the partnership agencies, the Departments of Social Services, Children and Families and Mental Health and Addiction Services, about matters relating to the mental health and substance abuse services for the entire HUSKY population – over 750,000 adults and children on Medicaid and CHIP.¹

We understand the challenges that this committee and the legislature as a whole face in crafting the state budget with a projected \$1.5 billion deficit for FY 18. However, low and middle income families are being asked to bear the brunt of the human services program cuts and tax increases proposed by the Governor. Recognizing the challenges faced by this body, Connecticut Voices for Children has put forward a menu of options that would provide a more equitable approach to raising the revenue needed to sustain essential programs, such as School-Based Health Centers and other critical supports for low-income children and families.²

We submit this testimony to oppose cuts to the Departments of Public Health and Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). In particular, we have concerns about cutting the following health services and programs:

- **Reducing funding for School Based Health Centers in the Department of Public Health Budget will reduce access to health care for children and youth.** The Governor's proposal reduces funding for School Based Health Centers by ten percent or \$1.13 million. According to the Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers, since 2015 the Centers have been subjected to cuts totaling \$2.5 million, resulting in the closure of centers and cutbacks in services.³ SBHCs provide primary care, including mental health (41 percent of all visits) and oral health services to tens of thousands of school-age children, and it is likely that additional reductions will lead to fewer children receiving early intervention and cost-effective services.

Research shows that School-Based Health Centers improve academic performance and attendance and reduce drop-out.⁴ Although some services are reimbursed by HUSKY or

private insurance, there are a multitude of barriers that prevent the Centers from receiving third party reimbursement. Among others, these barriers include high deductibles under private plans, non-coverage for prevention and care coordination, and denial of mental health visits.⁵

- **Reducing DMHAS Young Adult Services will decrease services and supports for young adults ages 18-25.** The Young Adult Services program would be reduced by 5 percent or \$4 million in FY 2018 and by an additional \$2 million in FY 2019. Provided by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) to young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 who age out of the care of the Department of Children and Families, the program provides a variety of supports including mental health treatment and housing in order to help these young adults make a successful transition to adulthood. Youth aging out of DCF care are extremely vulnerable to experiencing homelessness, incarceration, and human trafficking,⁶ and the supports provided by DMHAS help those with additional challenges achieve stability.
- **Reducing grants for mental health, substance abuse services, and employment services provided by DMHAS** will decrease community supports for both young and older adults living with behavioral health disorders. The Governor's Budget reduces these grants by \$4.6 million.⁷ The grants help offset costs of local programs that serve the uninsured and under-insured individuals, many of whom live with serious and persistent mental illness. These grants have been repeatedly reduced in prior budgets.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify regarding the Governor's Proposed Budget for the Departments of Public Health and Mental Health and Addiction Services.

Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or need additional information. I can be reached at slanger@ctvoices.org or (203) 498-4240 (x 121).

¹ For information on the Web about the Behavioral Health Partnership and the Behavioral Health Partnership Oversight Council, see <http://www.ctbhp.com/> and <https://www.cga.ct.gov/ph/BHPOC/>, respectively.

² Thomas D. Revenue Options are Key to Addressing Shortfalls and Supporting Thriving Families. Connecticut Voices for Children (January 2017). Available at:

<http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/Revenue%20Options%202017%20FINAL%20updated.pdf>

³ Connecticut Biennium FY 2018 – FY 2019: Governor's Budget. Available at:

http://www.ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/budget/2018_2019_biennial_budget/budgetdocs/021.sec.b.pdf

⁴ Malcarney, MB, Horton, K and White-Frese, J. School-Based Health Centers: Critical to Health Reform and Student Outcomes, Connecticut Health Foundation (January 2017).

⁵ Communication with Jesse White-Frese, Executive Director, Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers, February 8, 2017. See also, Malcarney, MB, Horton, K and White-Frese, J. School-Based Health Centers: Critical to Health Reform and Student Outcomes, Connecticut Health Foundation (January 2017). Available at: <http://www.cthealth.org/publication/school-based-health-centers-critical-to-health-reform-and-improved-outcomes-for-students/>

⁶ Updegrove, N and Ruth, L. The Time to Grow: Meeting the Needs of Connecticut Youth Aging out of Foster Care. Connecticut Voices for Children (December 2016). Available at:

<http://www.ctvoices.org/www.ctvoices.org/timetogrow>

⁷ Connecticut Biennium FY 2018 -2019: Governor's Budget. Available at:

http://www.ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/budget/2018_2019_biennial_budget/budgetdocs/021.sec.b.pdf