

Testimony of

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Regarding the Public Health Provisions of Governor Lamont's Budget Proposal

Appropriations Committee

February 26, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding the public health provisions in our state budget.

On behalf of the Community Health Center Association of Connecticut (CHC/ACT), and its sixteen member community health centers, I want to thank the Committee for its dedication to listening to Connecticut's residents about these important issues. Connecticut's community health centers serve more than 420,000 people each year, providing medical, behavioral health, and dental care in hundreds of locations across the state.

In addition to being the Chief Strategy Officer for CHC/ACT, I also serve on the Board of Directors for the CT Association of School-Based Health Centers.

Many Community Health Center locations are school-based health centers, providing convenient access to quality health care for students during the school day. Having health care providers on site in schools removes barriers to access, such as transportation and family work obligations, and helps improve both health and education outcomes.

Ninety school-based health centers, run by a wide variety of organizations, are partially funded by the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH). These sites are generally located in areas with high populations of low-income students, who are either on HUSKY or are undocumented without insurance. They are able to access medical, behavioral health, and oral health on-site in their neighborhood schools.

SBHCs do bill commercial insurance and HUSKY, and no child is turned away for inability to pay. Grants from DPH help provide financial sustainability, to ensure services are available for students when they need them. Given rising costs for staffing, medical supplies, and more, we are asking the Committee to include a 3% increase in these grants in the next fiscal year.

I also want to take this opportunity to share with the Committee that the increase that was included in the FY 2023 budget has not yet been passed along to grantee sites. Moreover, seven

months into FY 2024, none of the ninety grantees have received a single payment for this year's services. These payments are needed to keep them operating in schools across the state. Unfortunately, DPH has indicated that understaffing has curbed their ability to meet its obligations and pay its contractors. I know DPH appreciates the value of the services provided by School-Based Health Centers – and that Commissioner Juthani has indicated that the Department has focused on “rebuilding, strengthening, and expanding the Department’s core public health functions.” We are asking for your assistance in getting these payments out expeditiously.

Thank you for your consideration and your hard work on behalf of our great state. Please feel free to reach out with any questions: dpolun@chcaact.org or 860.667.7820.