

Appropriations Committee
February 17, 2026
Subcommittee on Elementary & Secondary Education
Public Hearing on the Governor’s Proposed FY 27 Budget Adjustments for Elementary & Secondary Education Agencies

Testimony of the Child Health and Development Institute (CHDI) regarding funding for the School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI)

Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Exum, Senator Somers, Representative Bolinsky and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Dr. Jeffrey Vanderploeg and I am the President and CEO of the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut (CHDI). I am writing in strong support of Connecticut’s School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) and to request restoration of full funding for this essential initiative.

The SBDI Model was Developed to address Exclusionary Discipline in Connecticut

SBDI was initially developed in 2008 by CSSD, DCF, and CHDI with funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Once MacArthur funding ended, SBDI’s success and outstanding preliminary data led to state funding support that has lasted 17 years. SBDI is now primarily funded and managed by CSDE, with additional support from CSSD and DMHAS. As one of the original model developers, CHDI has served as the SBDI statewide coordinating center since SBDI’s inception nearly 20 years ago.

SBDI is a *pre-arrest school-based diversion model* to build schools’ capacity to address student needs, and was among the first of its kind nationally. For that reason, SBDI has always been considered an innovative, national best practice. The core components of SBDI include the following:

1. **Training in the impact of trauma on child development, and behavioral health symptoms**, which frequently underlie disciplinary incidents.
2. Development of **classroom management and de-escalation** skills and engaging families in the disciplinary process.
3. Full implementation of **restorative practices** as alternatives to exclusionary discipline.
4. **Enhanced access to Mobile Crisis** -- the state’s most effective and rapid alternative to arrest, and a critical service for connecting students to ongoing services.
5. **Revisions to student codes of conduct** to de-emphasize punitive measures, and to promote accountability through more effective restorative approaches.
6. **Memoranda of Agreement** between school districts and local community-based providers to enhance student access to services and supports and reduce the likelihood of future incidents.

SBDI is Cost-Effective

SBDI was initially developed to address a costly issue faced by many states – exclusionary school discipline in the form of arrest, expulsion, and suspension. The research clearly tells us that the students most affected by exclusionary discipline are youth of color, youth with disabilities including behavioral health conditions, and youth with IEPs and 504 plans. **SBDI was designed to address the cost of arrest, juvenile justice involvement, and incarceration and is delivering a strong Return on Investment for Connecticut taxpayers and students.** First, SBDI has been shown to reduce costly juvenile court referrals by an average of 25% among participating schools. Second, SBDI is investing in the well-being of Connecticut’s students by reducing unnecessary entanglement in the juvenile justice system, and avoiding the academic disruption, absenteeism, and disengagement that comes with high rates of exclusionary discipline, particularly among youth of color and those with various disabilities.

SBDI Outcomes

We believe that funding should be sustained and expanded for services with a strong track record of high quality implementation, and data demonstrating effectiveness. SBDI has been delivering on those expectations for 17 years. Highlights include:

- A **25% decrease in court referrals** among participating schools.
- A **24% increase in students who are successfully connected** to Mobile Crisis and other behavioral health services, ensuring that underlying issues are addressed appropriately.
- SBDI is a success story for **scaling interventions that work in Connecticut**, reaching 82 schools in 29 districts, affecting over 91,000 students. These are often Alliance Districts and others with high student arrest rates.
- **Over 5,500 teachers and 150 school resource/law enforcement officers** have been trained to recognize and manage trauma and behavioral health concerns, and to implement restorative practices.
- Approximately **25% of SBDI's annual budget goes directly to schools** to serve as champions and co-implementers of the model. They also receive **performance-based incentives** for implementation quality and achieving outcome targets.
- **National Replication:** The success of SBDI has led to expansion of the model or its core components in Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New York and Wisconsin.

The Need for Full Funding

Members of the Appropriations Committee, we need SBDI to continue to support the well-being of our schools, students, and communities by reducing juvenile justice involvement, enhancing student accountability, and promoting positive educational outcomes.

You have received letters of support from leaders at participating SBDI districts detailing how SBDI is supporting teachers, helping improve student outcomes, and contributing to positive school and community culture and climate. Together with those District leaders across the State, we are asking that the Appropriations Subcommittee recognize the profound impact of SBDI by restoring full funding for SBDI. The Governor's budget imposes a 20% cut to this program and all others with legislatively directed funds. That approach will limit the effectiveness of all these programs and will be harmful to schools and students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Vanderploeg, PhD
President and CEO
Child Health and Development Institute (CHDI)