

Jeana's Verbal Testimony:

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 evening, Madame Co-Chairs and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Dr. Jeana Bracey and I am the Associate Vice President of School and Community Initiatives at the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut (known as CHDI). I am here in **strong support** of Connecticut's School-Based Diversion Initiative (or SBDI) and to request **restoration of full funding** for this essential initiative. I have **FOUR points** to support this request.

First (#1): The SBDI Model was Developed to address Exclusionary Discipline in Connecticut...and it has delivered.

SBDI is a unique *pre-arrest school-based diversion model* to build schools' capacity to address student needs, and **was among the first of its kind nationally**, since it was developed here in CT nearly 20 years ago. **As an innovative, national best practice** SBDI has achieved outcomes such as:

- A **25% average decrease in court referrals** from school-based arrests
- A **24% average increase in students who are successfully connected** to Mobile Crisis and other behavioral health services.
- We are keeping kids in classrooms and improving staff's capacity to support student well-being by **improving practice and policy.**

#2: SBDI is Cost-Effective

SBDI addresses the high costs of arrests and juvenile justice system involvement, and is delivering a strong Return on Investment for Connecticut taxpayers and students, at no-cost to participating districts, with no budget increases since being funded by the State.

#3: SBDI has consistently demonstrated effective Outcomes and high-quality implementation

CHDI co-developed the model and serves as the statewide coordinating center--I personally have worked on or directed SBDI for the last 15 years.

A few highlights include:

- SBDI has successfully **expanded across high need and Alliance districts in CT**, reaching 82 schools in 29 districts, affecting over 91,000 students.
- **We have trained Over 5,500 CT teachers and 150 school resource/law enforcement officers** in trauma-informed classroom behavior management skills, to recognize behavioral health needs, to use data-informed quality improvement, and to fully implement restorative practices.
- **And we support teachers and front-line staff.** Approximately **25% of SBDI's annual budget goes directly to schools** to support staff who serve as champions and co-implementers of the

model. Funds also support **performance-based incentives** for implementation quality and achieving benchmark outcomes.

Finally, #4: It's Imperative that Full Funding is Restored—we need SBDI to continue, for the well-being of our students

But don't just take my word for it.

You have received **15 additional written testimonies** as letters of support from leaders at **8 SBDI districts** detailing the profound IMPACT of how SBDI is supporting teachers, helping improve student outcomes, and contributing to positive school climate and strengthening community connections. **Collectively with our district partners across the State, we are asking that the Appropriations Subcommittee recognize the significance and importance of SBDI to those schools and those who have not yet participated but would greatly benefit, by restoring its full funding.** The 20% cut to the program in the proposed Governor's budget would dramatically limit the program's reach and effectiveness, disrupt services currently in place, and will ultimately be harmful to students, schools, and communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.