

Good Evening. I would like to thank the commissioners for this opportunity to speak. My name is Maria Castillo and I have been a LCSW at Morton East SBHC for over 13 years. I am here to give a voice to the students who receive much-needed services inside Morton East SBHC.

SBHCs are unique clinics that provide on-site comprehensive health care to children and adolescents who, in most cases, would otherwise not have access at all. The majority of students we serve at the Morton East SBHC are Latino from working families of the Cicero, Berwyn, Stickney, and Lyons community.

We see the many severely obese students, who come regularly for medical follow up, at times accompanied by their diabetic parents, who themselves lack access to these services. We see the failing student who has undiagnosed depression and the student who comes in for a routine physical and reveals, for the first time, that she has been a victim of sexual abuse. These students receive immediate on-site mental health services. With our small pharmacy, we are able to not just diagnose, but to ensure treatment for students. Teen mothers bring their infants for well child care and immunizations.

Approximately one third of our visits are for confidential services. These services would be **inaccessible** if not located inside the school. Depression and Anxiety has been recognized in Cicero as a major health concern among our youth. 40 percent of our Morton SBHC visits are for behavioural health. The adolescents receive mental health treatment where they spend most of their time- at their school. **Stigma, scheduling and transportation barriers are minimized.**

If the Morton East SBHC is closed and students are referred to outside facilities, such as the Cicero Health Center which is being proposed, we will create huge barriers to their care, resulting in delays in treatment, increased complications, missed appointments and more missed days from school. One does not have to be a public health expert to understand the long-term consequences to students, their families, and the community.

I've mentioned that almost half of our visits are for behavioural health services, ACHN is in the process of billing for behavioural health services rendered by LCSWs. In addition, we receive State School Health Funding through IDPH grants that help us sustain our services. We don't pay rent or bills such as heat and other utility bills since we're inside the school. We have a LONG strong collaborative relationship with District 201 School Community.

The job ahead of you is difficult. We ask you to do the right thing to keep this school clinic open within the high school for our youth.

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