

Senator Renee Unterman
Chair, Senate Preventing Youth Substance Use Disorders Study Committee
121-H Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334

October 22, 2015

Re: SBIRT, a tool to prevent youth substance use disorders

Dear Senator Unterman:

Thank you for your service on the Senate Preventing Youth Substance Use Disorders Study Committee and your leadership on a range of issues impacting Georgia's youth. We are writing on behalf of sixteen organizations. All of these organizations are committed to ensuring a healthy, bright future for every teen and young adult in Georgia by preventing substance use disorders. As such, we have joined together in a coalition and wish to express our support for the policy recommendations included in *Somebody Finally Asked Me: A Preventive Approach to Address Youth Substance Use* report by Georgia Council on Substance Abuse and Georgians for a Healthy Future.

As you know, drug and alcohol use impacts teens and young adults across the state. In fact, nearly one in five Georgia high school students has taken prescription drugs without a doctor's prescription. Having screening conversations with young people allows us to address this health problem early. SBIRT, which stands for Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment, is an evidence-based approach that uses simple questions and answers to get young people talking about their use. It helps adults have open conversations with kids and teens to identify alcohol or drug problems and help kids and teens get help, if it's needed. We encourage the Committee to consider recommending to the Georgia legislature to activate the Medicaid codes for SBIRT. This screening tool has been successfully implemented during a five-year pilot project in two hospitals in Georgia, resulting in a decrease in substance use among participants. States like Wisconsin and Texas have built on its clinical success and have demonstrated its cost-effectiveness, reducing hospital costs and emergency room visits. SBIRT is a screening tool, just like a mammogram or a blood pressure check, yet it isn't being used as widely as it could be. Activating Georgia's Medicaid codes for SBIRT would provide access to this beneficial service to the nearly 50 percent of Georgia's children who are enrolled in PeachCare and Medicaid.

Thank you for considering our input in the Preventing Youth Substance Use Disorders Study Committee's work. We share the Committee's goal of supporting youth by ensuring they have a substance-free future and we thank you for the spotlight you are shining on this important issue. We hope that the Committee will recommend the activation of Georgia's Medicaid codes for SBIRT as a strategy for preventing youth substance use.

Sincerely,

Roland J. Behm
Chair, Board of Directors
Georgia Chapter, American Foundation for
Suicide Prevention
Alejandro Calderon
GATE Program Coordinator
Center for Pan Asian Community Services,
Inc.

Pat Guiliani
Board Chair
Cobb Community Alliance to Prevent
Substance Abuse, Inc.

Teneka Gerido
Program Manager
Savannah Clubhouse
Gateway Behavioral Health Services

John Izzo
Substance Use Treatment Services
Administrator
Office of Behavioral Health Services
Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice

Dr. Aaron Johnson
Associate Professor
Institute of Public & Preventive Health
Georgia Regents University

Donald J. Palmisano
Executive Director & CEO
Medical Association of Georgia

Gabriel Kuperminc
Professor

Pierluigi Mancini, Ph.D.
CEO
CETPA, Inc.

Mary Jane Lewitt, Ph.Dd, CNM, FACNM
Chair
Coalition of Advanced Practice Registered
Nurses

Tammie Harrison
Community Resource Specialist
DeKalb Families in Action

Robyn Garrett-Gunnoe
Executive Director
Georgia Association of Community Service
Boards

David Laws
Board Member
Georgia Overdose Prevention

Michael Claeys, LPC, MBA
Executive Director, Behavioral Health
Services
Grady Health System

Brittney Newton
Voices for Prevention Coordinator
Voices for Prevention

Dr. Paul Seale
Family Physician

Enclosed: *Somebody Finally Asked Me: A Preventive Approach to Address Youth Substance Use*

cc: Members of the Senate Preventing Youth Substance Use Disorders Study Committee