



Board of County Commissioners

Dear Madame Chair Michaelson Jenet and members of the Public and Behavioral Health and Human Services Committee,

Boulder County and Boulder County Public Health respectfully request your support of SB23-174.

The evidence is overwhelmingly clear that Colorado is in the midst of a youth mental health crisis: in 2021, Children's Hospital declared a state of emergency for youth mental health, and suicide is the leading cause of death among Colorado youth ages 10-24. Youth mental health is an important local issue too. In Boulder County, 40% of our high school students reported feelings of depression in 2021. This includes about 1 out of 2 (47%) female high school students and about 3 out of 5 (58%) LGBTQ high school students.

Adolescence is a crucial period of healthy development, and it confers vulnerability to mental health challenges. Young people living at low-income are even more vulnerable to these challenges due to stressors like food and housing insecurity. Young people deserve access to the right support services and need to know that they can get the right care at the right time. Unfortunately, during our community health assessments, we have consistently heard from community members, including youth and parents, that access to mental health and substance use care is a barrier. Delays in care can lead to mental health crises for children and youth.

In Boulder County, we have almost 20,000 young people on Medicaid. By allowing Medicaid recipients under the age of 21 to access behavioral health services without a diagnosis, these 20,000 young people would have improved access to behavioral health care. Additionally, removing the need for diagnosis would lessen the administrative burden on our already challenged behavioral health workforce. Simply put, this bill will help Colorado youth access the behavioral health services they need to lead happy, healthy lives. It will remove a barrier to care and could ultimately save lives.

Thank you for your consideration of SB 174 and to the sponsors for bringing this bill forward.

Summer Laws, Policy Analyst, Boulder County Commissioners Office

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