



April 26, 2022

Dear Members of the House Public & Behavioral Health & Human Services Committee,

Thank you for your consideration of HB22-1369. On behalf of Children's Hospital Colorado, we are pleased to share our support and urge you to vote YES on this important bill. We appreciate the continued leadership from this committee and the legislature to prioritize solutions to address the mental health crisis facing children and youth in Colorado. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, children and families were struggling to access the services and supports they needed. However, during the pandemic, these needs have been exacerbated as children and families experienced tremendous stress driven by disruptions in daily routine, social isolation, financial insecurity and grief.

There has been a lot of media coverage during the pandemic about rising rates of anxiety, depression and suicide among adolescents. However, we are also seeing negative impacts of the pandemic for many babies and toddlers. At Children's Hospital Colorado, unfortunately we have seen more frequent developmental regression in young children, such as more difficult behavior, problems with sleeping and eating and regression in potty training. Providing mental health supports and guidance to families with children from prenatal to six of years of age has never been more important.

HB22-1369 provides \$2 million to the new Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) to support an evidence-based, two-generation and home-based prevention and early intervention program for infants, young children and their caregivers. It also requires ongoing quality assessments and improvement recommendations to ensure high-quality implementation and sustainability of this program. This one-time investment builds a strong foundation for infants and young children, but sustainability of these efforts will remain critical.

We are thankful to the proponents of this bill, and the sponsors, Rep. Sirota and Rep. Pelton, for their willingness to include an amendment to ensure that this program also reports outcomes to the Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) in addition to the CDEC. The BHA is charged with building an accountable, coordinated and effective behavioral health system across the care continuum. It is essential that the care continuum include infant and early childhood mental health, and that the BHA work closely with CDEC to ensure all Colorado families have access to the services and supports they need.

We urge you to support HB22-1369 and thank you for your commitment to the behavioral health needs of Colorado infant, young children and their families. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or need further information.

Sincerely,

Zach Zaslow, Director of Government Affairs
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April 21, 2022

Chair Dafna Michaelson Jenet

Members, House Public & Behavioral Health & Human Services Committee

Written testimony submitted via <https://leg.colorado.gov/testimony>
RE: HB22-1369 Children's Mental Health Programs

Dear Chair Michaelson Jenet and members of the Committee:

It is my pleasure to write in support of HB22-1369 Children's Mental Health Programs. Aurora Mental Health Center is a current provider of a Children's Mental Health Program that would be eligible to receive funds to expand the reach of critical services to families experiencing poverty, chronic stress and trauma. We launched services in the summer 2021 and currently deliver Child First to eligible families in Aurora and the surrounding area.

Child First has filled a major void in our array of services as we are now able to provide evidence-based, two-generation programming in the home for young children and families. When we applied to deliver this program, we spoke to the need in our community given the absence of targeted services for this population of families:

Aurora Mental Health Center will work with families in the city of Aurora. The issues facing families in this area are described here: There are families who face barriers such as stress, anxiety, social and cultural isolation, substance abuse, poverty, transportation, and their own adverse childhood experiences that often prevent them from seeking and staying engaged in support from clinic-based community mental health settings. In this community there are families and children under the age of five who are in need of care but who also face many barriers to accessing it. Primary barriers include concerns about cost and insurance coverage, stigma and concerns about treatment effectiveness, and a lack of awareness of resources.

Over the last year we hired and trained staff, accessed key referrals sources and began providing services to families. We currently have 45 families enrolled and are already seeing the impact of our work. Families are thriving in a system that allows

them to receive care in their homes and by a care team dedicated to helping them achieve their goals.

A recent referral of a three-month old baby girl illustrates the benefits of the Child First model in engaging a family that would have otherwise not engaged in a clinic-based program. The baby's father died of COVID three weeks before her birth, leaving her mother and 3 siblings (12, 5, and 18 mo.) without financial support. At the time of referral, Mother was not returning typical outreach efforts and, in partnership with the referral source, engaged with our Family Support Partner who went to her house with the appropriate intake paperwork. In the short month of their enrollment, we have helped her mother secure a stay on her eviction, apply for jobs, and connected her to community resources to provide baby supplies like diapers. With some of these physical needs met, the mother has begun prioritizing mental health needs of herself and her children with the clinician.

This is an important and thoughtful use of one-time funds given the program's ability to bill Medicaid as well as other funding once services are launched ensuring the program's long-term sustainability. We respectfully request your support for HB22-1369 so that Children's Mental Health Programs can be expanded to reach even more Colorado families who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

Sincerely,



Kelly Phillips-Henry, PsyD, MBA
Chief Executive Officer

House Public & Behavioral Health & Human Services

04/26/2022 01:30 PM

HB22-1369 Children's Mental Health Programs

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
Meridith Shuman For Tennyson Center for Children	<p>It is my pleasure to write in support of HB22-1369 Children’s Mental Health Programs. Tennyson Center for Children is a current provider of a Children’s Mental Health Program that would be eligible to receive funds to expand the reach of critical services to families experiencing poverty, chronic stress and trauma. We launched services in the summer 2021 and currently deliver Child First to eligible families in Jefferson, Boulder, and Broomfield counties. Child First has filled a major void in our array of services and we are now able to provide evidence-based, two-generation programming that works with young children and families, providing intensive, home-based services.</p> <p>There is a need for Child First in order to serve high-risk child welfare involved families, who often have co-occurring mental health and substance use issues. There are families who may be struggling with housing, health, access to care, poverty, substance use issues, and mental health.</p> <p>Over the last year we hired and trained staff, accessed key referrals sources and began providing services to families. We currently have 25 families enrolled and are already seeing the impact of our work. One family’s story, in particular, stands out:</p> <p>This child was referred to Child First after reunifying with mom. They have had several attachment disruptions and are re-learning how to be with each other. Mom is engaged and taking big steps to heal their relationship. She is starting to delight in things she and kiddo have in common, reflect on the impact of her own problems on their relationship and is open to our support while she accesses additional family services. This child was even dropped from a developmental evaluation waitlist during their last separation and with our help, mom was able to find and schedule a new one. Although mom wants to "focus" on kiddo, her openness to parent support reveals a hopeful longing to rekindle an emotional connection with her kiddo.</p> <p>This is an important and thoughtful use of one-time funds given the program’s ability to bill Medicaid as well as other funding once services are launched ensuring the program’s long-term sustainability. We respectfully request your support for HB22-1369 so that Children’s Mental Health Programs can be expanded to reach even more Colorado families who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.</p>



House Public & Behavioral Health & Human Services Committee
Colorado State Capitol

April 26, 2022

The Colorado Home Visiting Coalition is a nearly 30-year-old coalition of leadership organizations representing the statewide and local level needs of many early childhood home visiting programs. We collaborate to strengthen and advance the full continuum of home visiting services across Colorado. We would like to express our support for HB22-1369 – Child Mental Health Programs.

Home visiting is a service delivery strategy that “meets families where they are” which is often in their home to provide voluntary services that support their child’s healthy development. Colorado is fortunate to have a wide continuum of home visiting programs that families are able to choose from that meet their specific needs. This bill provides an opportunity to further expand access to the intensive Child First program that helps young families heal from trauma and adversity.

We know that healthy child development starts early and that the early years provide the foundation for future success. Programs like Child First that promote child and parent emotional health, child development and learning, and prevent child abuse and neglect are critical to helping parents experiencing stress to lay the strongest foundations they can for their children to thrive. Child well-being is something that we can build together in Colorado by investing in evidence-based programs that have a proven record of supporting families.

Every child is filled with tremendous promise and we have the responsibility to utilize our resources to invest in Colorado’s children. We urge you to support this important legislation that will help to foster well-being and support the healthy development of Colorado’s youngest residents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Knudtson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Laura Knudtson

Director
The Colorado Home Visiting Coalition