

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1357

April 17th 2018 - House Public Health Care and Human Services Committee

Mister Chair, Madam Vice Chair, members of the committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today. My name is Aubrey Boggs and I will be testifying in support of House Bill 1357 on behalf of the Colorado Mental Wellness Network, where I am the advocacy and outreach coordinator, and myself, as well as sharing testimony from a friend who could not be here today.

In early 2016 I began suffering severe trauma responses. This was compounded by my existing depression and anxiety, and I found myself needing support. I had health insurance through my husband's job and began the process of looking for a therapist. My depression made it difficult to get out of bed in the morning, and while calling around to find a therapist may seem a minor task to some, it can be a lot of work when someone is actively struggling with their mental health. After calling about 20 different providers that were listed on my health insurance's website as "in network" and "accepting patients" I was exhausted. Many of them were not in network anymore; some providers were not actually accepting new patients, despite the insurance company website saying they were, and the rest simply never returned my call.

The next thing I did was to talk to my PCP about referring me somewhere. She wasn't able to help me at all. After that encounter, I called my insurance company to see if they could help, and their only option was for me to continue calling people listed on their website. So I did, in fact I called over 30 more providers before I finally gave up. The amount of time and energy I had put into seeking mental health support left me exhausted and discouraged. My mental health got worse, and the next year was incredibly difficult. As I had in the past, I found ways to take care of myself as best as I could, but those things weren't sufficient. I needed appropriate mental health treatment, sought it out, and could not get it.

My husband's company switched carriers in 2017. In August of 2017 my mother died in a tragic accident while I was on vacation with her. I was, and still am, devastated. I knew I needed mental health care if I was going to get through the trauma and grief. Our new carrier did a much better job of keeping their network up to date, and I was able to find a therapist fairly quickly and easily. Access to therapy helped keep me from needing serious and expensive mental health crisis care.

A friend of mine, Krystallin Baker from Fort Collins, asked me to share her story.

I have always struggled with severe anxiety, panic attacks, depression, and OCD. However, recently I had a panic attack that was far worse than normal, to the point I was dissociating. I realized that it would be wise for me to see a psychiatrist since it was outside of the realm of normal mental health issues I have faced in the past. For weeks I tried to get ahold of a psychiatrist in Fort Collins. I tried to find providers through my insurance, but struggled to navigate who was in my network and who wasn't. I finally found someone I believed would be covered and left four voicemails before finally giving up. It is extremely difficult when you are mentally unstable to have the strength to fight for your own access to health care.



BE WELL. HAVE HOPE. *pass it on.*

Often, I have found it is much easier to simply give up and battle my mental demons on my own. To this date, I still haven't found help or heard back from any of the places I left voicemails."

Krystallin could not be here today, but wanted me to thank you for hearing her story as well.

The Colorado Mental Wellness Network supports House Bill 1357 because it adds real accountability for insurance carriers. Many people want help, but cannot find it. Many people seek help, and experience discrimination or care that is not as robust as their physical health care is. Parity is essential to keeping Coloradans well. If we ensure that parity is actually happening, we can make our state better for everyone.

I implore you to vote yes on House Bill 1357. Thank you for your time and for hearing my testimony today.

Aubrey Boggs

Advocacy and Outreach Coordinator

Colorado Mental Wellness Network

915 E 9th Ave

Denver, CO 80218