



Members of the House Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Lex Loutzenhiser and I am a Policy Manager with Illuminate Colorado, a statewide nonprofit working to strengthen families, organizations, and communities to prevent child maltreatment. I am submitting written testimony **to ask you for a 'yes' vote on SB24-059 Children's Behavioral Health Statewide System of Care.**

I want to highlight two main reasons Illuminate supports SB24-059:

1. **Establishing a children's behavioral health statewide system of care would promote protective factors that prevent child maltreatment.** Social and emotional competence of children and parental resilience are two of five research-informed protective factors for preventing child maltreatment.¹ When a child is experiencing a mental health challenge, children and caregivers may not be equipped with the knowledge and tools needed to respond to these challenges. Behavioral healthcare, such as counseling, case management, and peer support, provide youth with understanding and tools to develop positive mental health and provide caregivers with the knowledge and tools needed to respond to their children's needs. SB24-059 would promote protective factors by establishing a statewide system of care that would ensure caregivers and youth have access to the care needed to navigate mental health challenges and thrive.
2. **Bolstering a streamlined continuum of care would promote healthy outcomes for youth and families across Colorado.** Mental health challenges are rising among Colorado youth and Colorado lacks the infrastructure to effectively respond. According to Kids Count, one in six high school students seriously considered suicide in 2021 and, for children under the age of 18, mental health-related visits at emergency departments steadily rose between 2011 and 2021.² Other states that have established comprehensive statewide systems of behavioral health care have seen positive outcomes, including decreased suicide rates and mental health-related emergency visits.³ Accessible and affordable behavioral health care is integral to ensuring mental health challenges are addressed early and life threatening crises are prevented. SB24-059 is an important step toward ensuring all youth, from infancy to young adulthood and in every corner of the state, have access to the support they need.

When youth and caregivers have access to a comprehensive, children's system of care, we strengthen the foundation for families to thrive. **We urge you to support establishing a Children's Behavioral Health Statewide System of Care by voting 'yes' on SB24-059.**

Sincerely,

Lex Loutzenhiser, Policy Manager

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¹ Center for the Study of Social Policy. (n.d.) About Strengthening Families and the protective factors framework. Retrieved From: <https://cssp.org/our-work/projects/protective-factors-framework/>

² Colorado Children's Campaign (2023). KIDS COUNT in Colorado! Retrieved From: <https://www.coloradokids.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/2023-KC-Book-proof-8.23.23a.pdf>

³ Stroul, B., Pires, S., Boyce, S., Krivelyova, A., & Walrath, C. (2014). Return on investment in systems of care for children with behavioral health challenges. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development, National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health.

House Health & Human Services

05/02/2024 Upon Adjournment

SB24-059 Children's Behavioral Hlth Statewide Sys of Care

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
<p>Dana Flores</p> <p>For</p> <p>National Center for Youth Law Youth Justice Initiative</p>	<p>Good afternoon and thank you to the committee for the opportunity to testify in favor of Senate Bill 24-059. My name is Dana Flores and I am the CO Campaign Coordinator for the Youth Justice Team at the National Center for Youth Law. The National Center for Youth Law is an advocacy organization that empowers young people to use their lived experience to transform systems for the better. The National Center for Youth Law endorsed this bill because the System of Care model is good public policy.</p> <p>The System of Care model will save lives and it will save money. As the committee is well aware, we are experiencing a behavioral health crisis in Colorado. Children are sitting in detention as a result. Families are burying children who have overdosed as a result. We're literally shipping kids to other states to get the care they need. That makes no sense.</p> <p>When we try to address behavioral health needs through the child welfare system or through the juvenile justice system, we place too heavy a burden on those systems. We also often inadvertently start off on the wrong foot with youth and families. When we offer behavioral health support in the context of a child welfare or juvenile delinquency investigation, we are essentially asking young people "what is wrong with you?" in our very first interaction. The System of Care model isn't just an efficient method to connect people to behavioral health services— it's a better way to establish a relationship with youth and families. It's a model that is empowering rather than antagonistic.</p> <p>This bill proposes an infrastructure and a funding process to access behavioral health services that would reduce reliance on the juvenile justice and child welfare systems to both pay for and provide those services. Simply put, the System of Care model is a worthwhile investment in public health and this is the right time to make that investment. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of this bill and I ask you to vote in favor of SB 24-059.</p>
<p>Dawn Fritz</p>	<p>Colorado PTA supports Senate Bill 24-059</p>

<p>For Colorado Parent Teacher Association</p>	<p>A founding purpose of PTA is to promote safety for children and youth, and we are committed to improved behavioral health programs and services. PTA has a long history of supporting bills and policies which provide needed access to mental health care and resources to our kids.</p> <p>Too often there are significant barriers to obtaining mental and behavioral health care and PTA's members often experience significant challenges when trying to access necessary mental healthcare for their children.</p> <p>PTA believes every child deserves the opportunity to grow into a happy and healthy adult, which includes mental, physical, and overall well-being. All children and youth have the right to behavioral health services and the youth mental health crisis makes access to mental health care more important than ever.</p> <p>PTA supports this bill because it would make it easier for our children and youth to access behavioral health care.</p>
<p>Wendy Loloff Cooper For herself</p>	<p>Honorable Committee,</p> <p>I am asking for your support of SB24-059 due to my many years of experience working with students at-risk and my experiences with my own children.</p> <p>Its rather unbelievable, but during their K-12 experience my own 4 children experienced:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) the chronic illness & suicide of a best friend 2) a school shooting where a friend gunned down another friend 3) suicide of a classmate 4) divorce 5) justice engagement 6) gender dysphoria 7) suicidal ideation

	<p>8) depression</p> <p>Even as a middle class family, our attempts to provide a continuum of care were difficult amidst these circumstances and we bounced from here to there trying to get help, support, etc. and I believe not finding that despite multiple attempts still impacts my children now in their young adulthood.</p> <p>Asking for counseling at school, hiring counselors, visiting a psych unit at a hospital...none of it ended up being or leading to what my children really needed. I believe outlining a clear continuum of care could benefit Colorado's young people and be a much better use of limited resources.</p> <p>Families need to know where and how to find resources and what they can expect. Please pass SB24-059 to clear up the system confusion and help our young people thrive.</p>
<p>Meredith Henry For The Arc of Colorado</p>	<p>Across the state of Colorado, children and youth with an intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) also have mental health concerns and substance abuse issues, which present great challenges to their families and those who care for them in the fragmented systems that care for those living with disabilities. We support SB 24-059 Children’s Behavioral Health System of Care and the creation of a single point of access to address the behavioral health needs of children and youth in Colorado, regardless of payer, insurance, and income. The Arc of Colorado (ArcCO) and the entire Colorado Arc Network, greatly appreciate that the Children’s Behavioral Health system of care will service children and youth who have mental health disorders, substance use disorders, co-occurring behavioral health disorders, or intellectual and developmental disabilities.</p> <p>We want to thank the Bill Sponsors Representative Madam Majority Leader Duran and Madam Minority Leader Pugliese in the House and Senator Kirkmeyer and Senator Michaelson Jenet for their work on this important bill. The mental health of those with IDD have long been ignored or written off as an issue related to disability and not their mental health, therefor limiting or denying access to mental health care. People with IDD must not experience disability-related discrimination in decisions related to their mental health, substance use disorders, co-occurring behavioral health disorders to provide, delay, deny, or limit mental health and or health care interventions or treatments.</p> <p>Too often those children and youth living with a disability, including IDD are provided care in silos that impede a comprehensive approach to care coordination and create barriers to improving behavioral health needs. We support this bill for breaking down barriers in Colorado for all children and</p>

	<p>youth in Colorado to increase access to behavioral health services and supports to improve mental health and well-being.</p> <p>Thank you for your consideration.</p>
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Chair Daugherty, Representatives Brown and McCormick, and All Members of the Health and Human Services Committee.

Boulder County and CCAT (Counties and Commissioners Acting Together) support SB 59 [Children's Behavioral Health Statewide System of Care](#) There are many reasons proponents are supportive of SB 59, and I will focus my comments on the impact this bill will have in improving the lives of children in my own county.

Within the past year, a young person in Boulder County with significant behavioral health needs, trauma history, and other diagnosis was hospitalized on a M1 hold. As happens often in Colorado, the hospital was unable to secure in-patient behavioral health treatment. Even involvement of multiple county and state partners did not resolve the issue of the lack of treatment for this young person.

If a statewide system of behavioral health care had been available, this young person would have had access to much needed behavioral health services at the time when it could have done the most good, much earlier than at this time of crisis. Instead, this young person languished and his crisis grew more acute over time.

Unfortunately, this outcome is not isolated, and many children and youth, especially those served by our child welfare system, have to wait too long to access services. Behavioral health treatment for young people can make a world of difference for children facing the trauma of abuse.

We also know that due to systemic and interpersonal bias and racism, Colorado's Healthy Kids Colorado Survey has reported that Colorado youth who identify as LGBTQ+ and who identify as multi-racial face disparities in mental health in our state. SB59 requires that the state collect data on access to services by race, ethnicity and other demographic factors and track our progress in addressing disparities in access to care.

Boulder County also supports SB 59 for its ability to prevent involvement in systems such as the juvenile justice system, where children and youth of color are disproportionately involved. Too often we hear from parents that they have searched endlessly for mental and behavioral health services before their child commits a crime, but were unsuccessful in finding treatment. SB 59 takes a bold step forward in ensuring all children in our state have access to care.

We know that SB 59 will take years to implement, and that success will not be guaranteed. What we and other proponents are asking for today is your willingness and commitment to step forward as a state to develop this system and to ensure that the people who are most disparately impacted are included as part of the development of that system. I appreciate the work of Majority Leader Duran and Minority Leader Pugliese in bringing this bill forward during the Child Welfare System Interim Committee, and your consideration of our input and testimony on this bill. We respectfully urge a yes vote today. – Claire Levy, Boulder County Commissioner

