

4/3/23

Re: SB23-004

Dear House Education Committee Members:

I am a retired School Psychologist, and I am writing to ask you not to support SB 23-004 in the present form. This bill is purported to be the answer to a shortage of mental health providers in schools, but it does not consider many factors.

School Psychologists and Social Workers have education, training and have internships in schools so we are aware of all the issues with providing school services. School services are unique as they require the ability to work with multiple individuals including teachers, parents and students.

The idea that mental health providers all have the same education and training is simplifying the specialization in the field of mental health. This would be the same as saying all doctors are equally trained to provide any medical procedure.

The reason that it takes time to be trained to work in the schools is not just bureaucratic, it is based on the evidence-based education and training that is needed. Based on the criteria on the CDE licensing page, this includes:

School Psychologist

- Successful completion of an approved specialist-level program with a minimum of 60 graduate semester hours or a doctoral program for the preparation of school psychologists, serving children/students ages birth-21 at an accepted institution of higher education.
- Passage of the National School Psychology exam - National Certified School Psychologist (NCSP) certification or Praxis 5402.
- Successful completion of practicum consisting of a sequence of closely supervised on-campus or field-based activities, designed to develop and evaluate a candidate's mastery of distinct professional skills, consistent with program and/or course goals.
- Successful completion of internship consisting of a full-time experience over one year, or half-time over two years with a minimum of 1200 clock hours, of which 600 must be in a school setting.
- The internship may include, beyond the 600 hours in the school setting, other acceptable internship experiences, including in private, state-approved educational programs or in other appropriate mental health or education-related programs.
- May hold a valid NCSP credential, issued by the National School Psychology certification board.

School Social Worker

- Master's degree or higher in social work from an accepted institution of higher education.
- Documented evidence of completion of coursework in the areas of school and special education law, including content covering Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and the development of behavior intervention plans.
- Successful completion of the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) clinical, advance generalist or master's exam.
- Successful completion of a supervised 900 clock-hour practicum in the field of social work which shall have been completed in a school, social service agency, mental health clinic or facility and/or hospital setting.
- Successful completion of at least one field experience with school age children/students.

It seems to discount this training to see that fingerprinting and a background check are the only requirements that would be required of community mental health providers to work in schools. Additionally:

- Some mental health providers do not have the education or training needed to work across age ranges of children in schools.
- Many mental health providers do not have the education and/or training in behavior supports that are mandated in special education law.
- The evaluation of school mental health professionals follows standards from CDE. The standards are based on the training and education requirements for these positions. How and what standards will be used to evaluate mental health providers who do not have the same educational and training?
- The idea that a Special Service provider can provide supervision is also simplistic. Special Service providers are already overworked. To add additional duties to their already overwhelming job is not reasonable. Also, most administrators do not have any training in mental health and the ability to supervise these individuals.
- Individuals who want to become teachers can get a special license to teach while they pursue education to meet the licensing requirements. The same should be the case for those with a DORA license. They can work under a special license until they meet the licensing requirements for a School Psychologist, School Social Worker, or School Counselor.
- This law first should only be a temporary solution. Individuals without a school license should only be hired if all other options are exhausted, and those wanting

to work must enroll in a program such as a school psychology, school counseling or school social work preparation program.

I think the need for more mental health providers in schools definitely exists, but disregarding the need for well trained school mental health professionals is not the answer.

Sincerely,

Mary K. Halbrook

Retired School Psychologist

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Testimony as Submitted in Support of SB23-004: Employment of School Mental Health Professionals by Megan Ives, Senior Policy Analyst at the Colorado Children's Campaign

House Education Committee

April 6, 2023, 1:30 p.m.

HCR 0107

Dear Madame Chair and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of SB23-004. My name is Megan Ives and I am the Senior Policy Analyst at the Colorado Children's Campaign.

The Colorado Children's Campaign is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, policy, research and advocacy organization, committed to securing every chance for every child in Colorado since our founding in 1985. That includes advocating for better support for our state's youth and adolescents. We also convene the School Climate Coalition which is a cross-sector group of K-12, health, youth-serving organizations, and state agencies focused on improving Colorado learning environments to be safe and supportive.

We appreciate Representatives Michaelson Jenet and Young for their leadership on this bill to remove barriers to school employment of mental health professionals.

The share of Colorado youth experiencing negative mental health outcomes has significantly increased in recent years. National data from Youth Truth tell us that secondary students at every grade level have stated that depression, stress, and anxiety are the most common barriers to learning. And fewer than half of them, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, and racial identity, have an adult they feel comfortable talking to when stressed or upset. State data from the 2021 Healthy Kids Colorado Survey found that 40% of youth experienced feelings of depression in the past year, an increase of 35% since 2019.

With this knowledge comes a responsibility to provide access to affordable, high quality behavioral health care services and professionals in every region of the state. We know that many schools and districts struggle with workforce challenges. SB23-004 works to address regulatory challenges to this access.

Schools are crucial settings for addressing the mental wellness of students. Data show that more than half of mental health challenges begin before the age of 14. Of those students who access the treatment they need, at least 70% begin their journey to treatment at school. |

Commented [HN1]: Maybe cite this data in a footnote

Access to mental health professionals in school settings is more critical than ever to the well-being of young people in our state.

We support this effort to increase access to quality, licensed mental health professionals in our schools. We urge a yes vote on SB23-004.

Thank you,

Megan Ives
Senior Policy Analyst
Megan@coloradokids.org

Cited sources:

Data show that more than half of mental health challenges begin before the age of 14 (*National Alliance on Mental Illness [Children MH Facts 9-21-16_rev \(nami.org\)](#)*).

Of those students who access the treatment they need, at least 70% begin their journey to treatment at school (Rones, M., & Hoagwood, K. (2000). *School-based mental health services: A research review. Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 3(4), 223-241. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1026425104386>).



SB23-004Ruby Martinez to: committees.lcs.ga@coleg.gov 04/07/2023 12:03 PM

Hello. I am having difficulty sending written feedback on the bill mentioned above. Please forward this to the appropriate legislators:

I am Ruby Martinez, an advanced practice psychiatric RN. My educational preparation allows me to perform psychiatric evaluations, prescribe medications, and to conduct therapy with people who have mental illness or are in distress. I respectfully request that SB 23- 004 be amended to include Advanced Practice RNs who have specialized education in mental health in the list of providers who could serve children in CO schools.

Thank you,

Ruby Martinez, RxN, CNS, PhD

Sent from [Mail](#) for Windows 10

Ruby J. Martinez, PhD, RN

House Testimony in support of Senate Bill 23-004: Employment of School Mental Health Professionals

Thank you Chair, members of the committee, and bill sponsors.

My name is Dr. Jennifer Yaste Guthals. I live in Fort Collins and I am the Director of Student Success for Thompson School District. I provide support, oversight, and guidance for social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health for school counselors and administrators. I have been a licensed teacher and principal for over 20 years, and have a doctorate in Educational Leadership. I am also a proud parent of two teenagers trying to make their way into the adult world.

I am here in support of SB23-004 as a parent and an educator, because I see firsthand how critical access to mental healthcare is for students to succeed. The mental health of our youth is something that impacts our entire community. Children's Hospital Colorado has declared a "youth mental health state of emergency." National data from the Centers for Disease Control show that our teenagers are struggling with sadness, anxiety, hopelessness and depression.

The great news is that anxiety and depression are both preventable and treatable through increasing protective factors and access to quality mental healthcare.

Colorado schools have increased school mental health professionals, professional learning for staff about how to prevent and respond to mental health crises, and prevention education for students. Our strong community partnerships with local mental health providers and prevention experts are also critical.

Unfortunately, all of these supports are not enough. If it was, we would not see a rise in intensity of suicide risk assessments. We would not see an increase in ER visits due to suicidality. We would not see students struggling with chronic absenteeism and behavioral issues that result in exclusionary school discipline.

Most Colorado families whose children are struggling in this way must look outside the school for assistance. Families may find that their community faces a shortage of mental health providers. It can also be confusing for families to navigate the many providers who are available, what they can offer, and their availability for school-aged children and insurance. Families may struggle with access due to transportation or job schedules.

Some of our Colorado students are lucky enough to experience mental healthcare directly in their school because their community has a provider willing and able to partner with their local school district to provide DORA licensed school-based mental health treatment. Unfortunately, some of our Colorado communities do not have a community partner able to enter into an agreement in this way, or can only provide services to students on Medicaid. In addition, these arrangements place our schools in a position to rely on outside partners to recruit, hire, supervise, and retain these highly sought after specialists.

As an experienced principal and administrator, I have hired, supervised, evaluated, and retained staff in a variety of specialized areas licensed through the Department of Education, including school counselors, school social workers, school nurses, and more. In order to do this well, I have attended training, and researched and observed masters in the field. Continuously improving on how I can best support those working with and on behalf of children to do their best *for* children is one of the most critical responsibilities I have. I have no doubt that the outstanding school principals of Colorado would apply the same diligence and dedication to supervising and evaluating specialized mental health staff if this bill is passed and they can recruit, hire, supervise, and maintain mental health staff licensed through DORA.

I haven't yet mentioned the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, but this is clearly a critical factor in why I am so passionate about increasing access to school-based mental health providers. The impacts of the trauma and social isolation of the height of the pandemic lockdown will be affecting our youth for years to come. Our youth are the future of our communities; if we want vibrant communities and a successful democracy in the future, we must do the very best we can for our youth right now. Please support this bill so Colorado's schools can provide what our children need to succeed—mental healthcare right in their schools, every day.

House Education

04/06/2023 01:30 PM

SB23-004 Employment Of School Mental Health Professionals

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
Jennifer Goodwin Against themselves	<p>Jennifer Goodwin- I oppose SB23-004 as it interferes with the parent/child relationship and builds bureaucracy, not helping the student in need or alerting the parent that there is a mental health problem. I want more support for the students not the bureaucracy. I also worry that the mental health experts are not available for the school setting for various reasons, low pay is one of them. VOTE NO on this badly written bill and let us as Coloradans do this necessary work correctly by HSA, FSA and other already established means of getting medical/mental health coverage. I know so many parents that cannot help their mentally ill children because they are 18 years of age.</p> <p>Thanks for your service.</p>
Lydia Waligorski For Clayton Early Learning	<p>Clayton Early Learning is in strong support of SB23-004. As the one of the largest Head Start Providers in the State, and as a provider of high quality whole child whole family early education we see families and children deal with trauma each and every day. We frequently see families dealing with trauma related to poverty, food insecurity, and sadly violence.</p> <p>Clayton as a school and campus utilizes the Sanctuary model for trauma informed care and practice across each of our departments because we know early intervention and consistent practices can create a place of safety, inclusion and belonging which becomes a protective factor against future traumatic events.</p> <p>We support more mental health interventions for students, families, and educators, many of whom are facing unprecedented levels of stress post pandemic. This bill represents a common sense way to reduce barriers and increase access to mental health support at time when it is most needed.</p> <p>Respectfully submitted,</p> <p>Lydia Waligorski, MPA Director of Policy and Advocacy Clayton Early Learning</p>