



**Envision:You Testimony on HB 22-1157 The Utilization of Demographic Health Data By
The Department of Public Health and Environment to Address Health Inequalities**

Thank you, Madam Vice Chair and Committee Members. My name is Steven Haden, my pronouns are he/him, and I am here representing Envision:You. We aim to eliminate mental health disparities for LGBTQ+ Coloradans by educating and building awareness around mental health and substance use disorders; providing training, education, and resources to expand the availability of culturally affirming treatment services; and advocating for changes to local and state-wide policies to advance equity of LGBTQ+ individuals living with mental health and/or substance use disorders.

As you may know, Colorado's LGBTQ+ community faces significant health disparities with regards to mental health and substance use. LGBTQ+ Coloradans experience depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, and suicide contemplation at three times the rate of the general population. According to the Envision:You 2021 State of the State Survey, 43% of LGBTQ+ Coloradans have unmet behavioral health needs and 50% have seriously considered suicide at some point in their lives. These disparities are even more pronounced for transgender and non-binary individuals, as well as for those who hold multiple marginalized identities including People of Color and those from Native communities..

Advancing behavioral health equity for LGBTQ+ Coloradans requires understanding of the specific and diverse behavioral health experiences and needs of individuals and groups within the LGBTQ+ community. This is particularly critical for LGBTQ+ individuals identifying



as transgender and/or non-binary, for whom samples sizes are often low, leading to their information being suppressed and sometimes excluded from analysis. Being able to identify gaps in LGBTQ+ behavioral health needs and make timely decisions that can improve the quality of life for those struggling with mental health challenges is essential for achieving health equity.

The demographic data HB 22-1157 proposes to be collected by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment will help contextualize the needs and experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals and can be used to fill gaps in programming, policy, and services. In addition, the data will bolster information on groups that remain underrepresented in existing research efforts and show emerging themes for these populations. Many underserved communities are often overlooked in population-level research efforts, which further perpetuates health disparities faced by individuals who hold multiple disadvantaged identities. Without truly understanding the experiences and needs of underrepresented communities, a critical gap in focused resources will remain.

It is essential that data is collected to monitor health inequities and that plans are formulated to address existing health inequalities for Colorado's most vulnerable populations. Reducing health disparities will improve the ability for LGBTQ+ folks, and all Coloradans, to live longer and healthier lives. Envision:You strongly supports House Bill 22-1157 to utilize voluntary demographic data to address health inequalities and improve health care standards for all communities within Colorado. Thank you to Representatives' McCormick, Titone, and Ortiz,



as well as Senator Jacquez Lewis for bringing this bill forward. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.