



Envision:You Testimony on HB 21-1097 Establishing a Behavioral Health Administration

Thank you, Madam Chair. My name is Steven Haden and I am testifying on behalf of Envision:You. Envision:You's mission is to support, educate and empower members of Colorado's LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning) community living with a mental health or substance use disorder. We are a statewide, multi-year initiative aiming to eliminate the behavioral health disparities between Colorado's LGBTQ+ community and the general population by 2040.

According to One Colorado's 2019 Closing the Gap report, LGBTQ Coloradans experience three times the rates of depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, and suicide contemplation compared to their straight counterparts. LGBTQ+ Youth in Colorado are especially at risk for behavioral health challenges, with 20% of LGBQ and 33% of Trans Youth reporting a suicide attempt on the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey in 2017. Nationwide, 18% of LGB adults have a diagnosable substance use disorder and 9% struggle with opioid use. Trans individuals have been persistently excluded from routine health monitoring, but surveys conducted by the Fenway Institute suggest that 40% of Trans individuals have attempted suicide in their lifetimes and 25% experience a substance use disorder.

Members of Colorado's LGBTQ+ community face substantial health disparities when it comes to behavioral health, and the community often receives poor quality of care due to stigma,

lack of adequate provider training, and insensitivity to the unique needs of LGBTQ+ folks. In a nationwide survey of LGBTQ+ people conducted by the Fenway Institute, more than half of all respondents reported that they have faced cases of providers denying care, using harsh language, or blaming the patient's sexual orientation or gender identity as the cause for an illness. Fear of discrimination may lead some people to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity from providers or avoid seeking care altogether. OneColorado also found that 61% of LGB and 84% of Transgender Coloradans said there were not enough behavioral health providers that were sufficiently trained to provide care for them. Oftentimes, finding a LGBTQ+ identity-affirming provider is a significant barrier to care with limited online resources for LGBTQ+ behavioral health care navigation.

The establishment of a Behavioral Health Administration would streamline the state's entire behavioral health system to better meet the needs of all Coloradans, including those who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. The BHA's focus on providing equitable access to culturally-responsive prevention, treatment, and recovery services would directly benefit LGBTQ+ folks across the behavioral health continuum. Furthermore, BHA efforts to enhance provider training can augment LGBTQ+ identity-affirming training programs to improve accessibility of care and reduce provider discrimination. The BHA's stakeholder outreach plan will also allow for LGBTQ+ voices to be heard and incorporated into the administration's activities. Envision:You strongly supports HB 20-1097 and the creation of a Behavioral Health Administration in Colorado.

Envision:You is grateful to Governor Polis, Lt. Governor Dianne Primavera, and Executive Director Michelle Barnes from the Colorado Department of Human Services for your leadership in changing how behavioral health services are delivered in Colorado. Thank you as

well to the sponsors Representative Young and Representative Pelton for bringing this legislation forward. I would be happy to take any questions you may have. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Helpful Links:

[HB 21-1097](#)

[BHA Stakeholder Meeting Presentation Slides](#)

[CDHHS Behavioral Health Reform Webpage](#)