

Dear Madam Chair and members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit a testimony. My name is Dr. Robin Johnson. I am an emergency physician by training and practiced for 24 year at UCHHealth Memorial. I have worked in health care advocacy through-out my career serving on various boards, providing care through our safety net clinics, and serving as the Deputy Medical Director of Colorado Springs Fire Department (CSFD) Community and Public Health Division (CPHD). Presently, I am Medical Director for El Paso County Public Health.

I am submitting this testimony today as part of a consortium of professionals brought together by Gazette Charities and the Anschutz foundations to work on improvements to the state's behavioral health system. We support House Bill (HB) 1085.

Secure transportation programs are not new, they are part of some incredibly valuable and effective communitywide partnerships, including one in Colorado Springs that that I helped institute. In 2012 the CSFD, in collaboration with two local hospital systems, developed a prehospital navigation program called CARES, which stands for Coordinated Access Referral Education Services. The goal was and continues to be connecting our community members to the Right Care at the Right Place and in the Right Time. Early on it became evident that the majority of our clients not only had had medical concerns but were experiencing behavioral health (BH) and/or substance use disorder (SUD) which complicated their lives exponentially. With our CARES program and in-sights we were poised to respond to the need for a mobile crisis response for mental health issues when the state brought crisis dollars forward in 2014. At the end of that year CSFD, again in collaboration, began CRT, the Community Response Team. This co-responder model utilized a police officer, paramedic, and social worker from Diversis to respond to mental health call from the state crisis line and 911. They arrive in an unmarked minivan. From its inception it has been remarkable effective and that has not changed.

- 97% of clients are diverted from the emergency department where previously they would be held averages of 3 days to 3 weeks prior to placement or release.
- 50% of clients are stabilized in field and connected to outpatient resources.
- The Team has authority to transport to the correct resource, facility when needed (detox, BH services – walk in units vs in hours, VA services are a few of those examples).

With-in six months we developed a second unit and CRT continued to grow. Presently there are four units which function seven days a week.

- Each call releases two police units and one fire unit per call.

In 2017 Public Health stood up a county model based off of the CSFD model with the Sheriff and BH services from UCHHealth. Their data is consistent with what we have seen with CRT. Presently they have two units and a third has recently been set up out of the city of Fountain.

These efforts empower our first responders to respond effectively, respecting our community members and creating collective impact to achieve not only individual health but community health.

The program has been funded primarily with a combination of city funding, agency allocation of resources, grant funding and support from the UCHealth and Centura. These efforts have created what is widely acknowledged to be one of our greatest assets in El Paso County. It is essential to develop continued growth in funding to create ongoing sustainability. The creation of a new Medicaid benefit proposed in HHB 1085 to support this program is very important as it does just this. HB1085 helps achieve a sustainable funding source for secure transport services. I am hopeful you will support this legislation and continue to build on this concept in future years. I am happy to answer any questions that you might have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin E. Johnson MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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