



March 31, 2021

Dear members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee:

I write on behalf of Colorado Nonprofit Association to express our support for SB 21-181. Our membership consists of over 1,400 nonprofit organizations statewide. Our mission is to lead, serve, and strengthen Colorado's nonprofit community to improve the quality of life throughout our state.

We support this legislation because the COVID pandemic has illuminated and exacerbated the existing health disparities affecting Colorado's underrepresented communities, bringing attention to the vulnerability of many Coloradans.

Developing a strategic plan for health equity will ensure that Colorado takes a concerted approach to reducing health disparities. This includes focusing on the social determinants of health to address the root causes of health inequities.

SB 21-181 also provides funding to strengthen the ability of nonprofits to reduce health disparities by working with underrepresented communities to identify and implement necessary changes to systems and public policy. Creating lasting change means not only investing resources in how individuals are served but also in addressing whole systems that lead to disparities.

Health is critical to the economic advancement and personal fulfillment of so many Coloradans. By expanding resources now to focus on the social determinants of health within underrepresented communities, the health outcomes of many Coloradans will be positively impacted, resulting in fewer health disparities and a healthier and more productive Colorado.

We thank the sponsors for bringing this bill and ask you to vote yes. Contact me with any questions.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark Turner".

Mark Turner, Senior Director of Public Policy
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POLICY STATEMENT

Colorado’s LGBTQ+ community faces significant mental health and substance use disparities compared to the general population. LGBTQ+ individuals also experience stigma, discrimination, and inadequate care due to identifying with a marginalized sexual orientation, gender expression, or gender identity. Envision:You strongly supports SB21-181 to address health disparities in Colorado through community grants, regular reporting, and the development of a state agency equity strategic plan. We would like to further emphasize the necessity of addressing health disparities for LGBTQ+ Coloradans in addition to health disparities based on race or ethnicity.

SB 21-181 Concerning State Agencies Addressing Health Disparities in Colorado

Senate Bill 21-181 renames the “health disparities grant program” to the “health disparities and community grant program”, and authorizes the office of health equity to award grants to prevent the exacerbation of health disparities in marginalized populations. This bill allows the office of health equity to fund grants using money transferred from the prevention, early detection, and treatment fund, as well as any additional funds appropriated by the legislature for community organizations to combat health disparities. If passed, SB 21-181 would also mandate the office of health equity to issue a report every 2 years on health disparities by race and ethnicity, and would require the formation of a state agency work group to create an equity strategic plan.

Why it Matters

Colorado’s LGBTQ+ community faces significant health disparities with regards to mental health and substance use. According to OneColorado’s 2019 Closing the Gap report, LGBTQ+ Coloradans experience depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, and suicide contemplation at 3 times the rate of the general population. Youth who identify as LGBTQ+ are especially at risk, with 20% of LGBQ and 33% of Trans Youth reporting a past-year suicide attempt on the 2017 Healthy Kids Colorado Survey. Nationwide, LGB individuals have greater than 2 times the rates of substance use disorder and opioid misuse.

LGBTQ+ individuals also face stigma, bullying, isolation, and rejection due to identifying with a marginalized sexual orientation, gender expression, or gender identity. OneColorado found that 42% of LGBTQ+ Coloradans worry their healthcare provider is not supportive of LGBTQ+ people and 36% fear discrimination from their provider. Furthermore, 61% of LGB and 84% of Transgender Coloradans said there were not enough behavioral health providers that were adequately trained to provide care for them. Fear of discrimination and provider incompetence may lead some people to conceal their LGBTQ+ identity from providers, and may discourage others from seeking care altogether.

LGBTQ+ individuals living in Colorado face major behavioral health disparities and require identity-affirming, non-discriminatory services to ensure holistic health and well-being. Envision:You strongly supports SB21-181 to reduce health disparities for marginalized populations through community grants, regular equity reports, and

a state agency equity strategic plan. We further recommend that the office of health equity regularly reports on health disparities for LGBTQ+ individuals in addition to health disparities by race and ethnicity.

Envision:You

The Envision:You mission is to support, educate and empower Colorado's LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning) community living with a mental health or substance use disorder. Furthermore, we work to inform the public—including elected officials and policymakers—about the disparities in care facing LGBTQ+ people. Finally, we support partners and allies to enhance training, research, education, and resources to assist LGBTQ+ people. To learn more please visit: www.envision-you.org.

Written Testimony as prepared for delivery in support of **SB21-181: Equity Strategic Plan Address Health Disparities** by Riley Kitts, Government Affairs Director at the Colorado Children's Campaign

- Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee.
- My name is Riley Kitts and I am the Government Affairs Director at the Colorado Children's Campaign where we advocate for every chance for every child.
- The Children's Campaign supports this bill and we are thankful to Senator Fields and Senator Coram for bringing it forward.
- All Colorado children and their families should have access to the community environments and supports needed to be healthy. However, it remains true that in many cases, Colorado's families of color experience barriers to health coverage as well as worse health outcomes at higher rates when compared to their peers. This is evident across several health indicators, including:
 - Higher rates of children of color who are uninsured,
 - Higher rates of people of color who are pregnant receiving late or no prenatal care, and
 - Higher rates of infant mortality and maternal mortality among families of color.
- These negative health outcomes are not due to differences in biology or genetics; they are the result of social factors and institutionalized racist practices that have created barriers for people of color in our state to access high quality, affordable health care that meets their needs, as well as community environments with resources that support optimal health.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted this reality, as black, Native and Hispanic/Latino Coloradans, as well as immigrant communities in our state, have experienced disproportionately high case and/or death rates from COVID. We can work toward addressing the root causes of health disparities so that in future public health crises Coloradans of color are not placed at increased risk.
- Understanding the social determinants of health in our state, as well as how they impact Coloradans differently, is an essential step on our path toward health equity for all. There are many powerful community-based organizations that have built trust through serving our communities of color and are well positioned to do this work.
- Thank you, and we ask that you support SB21-181.

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SENATE

Concerning State Agencies Addressing Health Disparities in Colorado

Good afternoon Madame Chair and committee members. My name is Jean Nofles, volunteer state president for AARP of Colorado and its 660,000 plus members in Colorado.

I can't be here to testify in person or even remotely, but I can submit written testimony. What this bill proposes to do is so important that it needs demonstrated support.

AARP strongly supports SB21-181.

"If you want to make the world a better place take a look at yourself and make a change." That is a line from a Michael Jackson song, Man in the Mirror. That is what this bill proposes to do...make a change to decades, centuries of inequities.

SB21-181 proposes to rename the "health disparities grant program" to the "health disparities and community grant program" and expand the program to award grants to organizations who would positively affect the disparities in the social determinants of health in underrepresented communities.

Making changes through policy and state systems is as close to a core change as is possible for a state agency.

I have seen bills that nibble around the edges of dynamic change but never really change anything.

This bill, because it invests in community organizations close to the underrepresented people, requires a strategic plan, aims to reduce the risk of future disease and reduce exacerbation of health disparities in underrepresented communities, just might do what we say we want to do.

SB21-181 helps not only the full community but will be especially beneficial to the aging underrepresented whose lives are made more difficult by the disparities in the social determinants of health.

AARP strongly supports this bill and requests that you support it, too.

Thank you for listening.