

House Health & Human Services

02/19/2025 01:30 PM

HB25-1132 Military Family Behavioral Health Grant Program

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
<p>Sarah Robirds For Colorado PTA</p>	<p>Colorado PTA supports House Bill 1132.</p> <p>PTA believes all children deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential and it is our responsibility to advocate for programs and legislation that supports that goal. House Bill 1132 has the ability to positively influence not only the mental health and well-being of children, but also their caretakers and family members.</p> <p>Military children and their families face a unique set of circumstances and may face more mental health challenges than their civilian counterparts due to frequent moves, separation from family members for extended amounts of time, and other challenges associated with serving in the armed forces. Service members and veterans are also an underserved population when it comes to mental healthcare and are more vulnerable to mental health crises due to trauma, stigma, and other barriers.</p> <p>Mental health has the power to impact family dynamics, school success, and how well we function in our communities and workplaces. Military-connected children and adults need access to mental healthcare and by creating this grant program and expanding access to mental health services, we are supporting our military families in a way that honors their service and providing them a greater chance for success as community members, students, caretakers, and parents.</p> <p>Colorado PTA was proud to support Proposition KK and we are glad to see some of the funds generated from the new tax go toward supporting the mental healthcare of military families.</p>

Testimony on HB25-1132 Military Family Behavioral Health Grant Program

February 19, 2025

In November of 2024, voters approved Prop KK, which created an excise tax on firearms etc, which is expected to provide \$39 million annually. It is supposed to be distributed in this order: \$0.2 - \$0.4 million to the Department of Revenue for administrative costs; \$30 million as grants to local governments, law enforcement, and nonprofits to provide crime victim services; \$5 million to the Department of Veterans & Military Affairs (DMVA) Veterans Mental Health Service for mental health services to eligible veterans in state-administered veterans living centers who have exhausted their federal benefits; \$3 million to the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Crisis Response System; \$1 million to the School Security Disbursement Grant Program.

The fiscal notice for HB25-1132, recognizes the bill, instead of following what voters approved, redirects the funds earmarked for the Veterans Mental Health Services Program of the Department of Military Affairs to a Grant Program within the Colorado Department of Human Services for the Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) to administer, The Military Family Behavioral Health Grant Program. Bottom line, at least fiscally for the state, the bill results in no impact on expenditure because it reduces by \$1.5 million the amount received by the DMVA and increases funds received by BHA by the same amount.

However, HB25-1132 passed as is, potentially will have a negative impact to the veterans of the state. According to the Fiscal note, because veterans have not received any excise funding, there will be no reduction in services (subject to the decisions of the JBS in this fiscal year) under the DMVA grant program. Instead, once excise tax revenue is received by the state, the reduction of \$1.5 million annually in the dedicated amount to the DMVA mental health grant program, will limit development, growth, and implementation of the DMVA's mental health programs such as those offered at the Pueblo Vet Center.

Rural veterans and active military are defined by the DMVA as underserved populations. There are several reasons including the distance they must travel to access VA health centers, the lack of dedicated public transportation, road conditions, weather, and it's more efficient to deliver services where the population is within close proximity. Rural populations are used to being excluded. Prop KK, when setting up the recipients of the funds for the DMVA Mental Behavioral Grants, only included 4 of the 5 Veterans Community Living Centers in Colorado: those with contracts with the Colorado Department of Human Services. The one which was excluded is the 2nd largest in the system and the most rural. HB25-1132 with its priority that the recipients of the Military Family Behavioral Grants be located within 50 miles of a military installation, excludes service providers who are located in and already serving rural Colorado. The funding

would go a long way in assisting these providers in developing programs which are comprehensive and tailored to the community as recommended by the Office of Suicide Prevention which is under the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. There are 6496 active military and veterans in rural Colorado who fit within at least 3 priority demographics for needing those programs developed. They are veterans living in rural Colorado who participate in the high-risk occupation of farming and ranching. That number does not include their families, or retired ex-military who have chosen to reside in rural Colorado.

You, as the House Committee which has been assigned HB25-1132, have the opportunity to take this bill and amend it to ensure that it truly does meet its expressed goal establishing and expanding community behavioral health programs for service members, veterans, and their families across the state.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jim and Jo Stanko

Steamboat Springs Colorado