

2022 W. Las Flores Dr.  
Pueblo, Colorado 81007

February 2, 2018

Dear Members of the Colorado Senate State, Veterans, & Military Affairs Committee: Senators Marble, Sonnenberg, Court, Fenberg and Hill:

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 18-113 -CONCERNING ESTABLISHING THE CIRCLE PROGRAM FOR SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS. I am writing in lieu of testifying in person because I will be out of the country when this bill comes to your committee.

I am a board certified Addiction Psychiatrist and have been the medical director for the Circle Program at the Colorado Mental Health Institute at Pueblo since July 1999. I applied for the position when it became open because this type of program does not exist anywhere else in the country and it was a phenomenal opportunity to work in a program where I had the possibility of actually helping people recover from substance abuse and mental illness. I told the then superintendent, Robert Hawkins, that I wanted the job but would not do it unless I could make the program tobacco free. He was totally supportive of the idea although he had been told by an earlier medical director that would be impossible and the wrong thing to do. Previously as the director of a private substance abuse treatment program, I succeeded in making that program tobacco free. I was told at the time that I would not be able to do the same thing with people who are dually diagnosed. However, we went tobacco free at Circle in January 2000 and it has been one of the best moves for the program. Prior to going tobacco free we had only about 56% of the patients actually complete the 90 day program. In the last ten years we have averaged 80% of the patients successfully completing the program. I have published several peer reviewed papers reporting the program outcomes and have attached one in which we followed 140 people for one year after treatment. At the end of the year 54% were sober and doing well with only 24% recidivism. These are impressive outcomes given that the populations we treat are those who have failed numerous other treatment programs and have been in and out of jail/prison due to their substance abuse.

Since I have been the medical director we have gone through 3 closures of the program. The first was in 2003 when we had a 30 bed unit. We fought that with a ground swell movement from all over the state, including probation officers, judges and other treatment providers who experienced the benefits the program provides to the state in terms of a safety net for those who are not successful at less intense levels of treatment. At that time we were allowed to stay open but the program was cut by 10 beds. The second closure was in 2011. This was in the middle of our outcome study and I had collected enough data on 40 people who had completed the year after treatment to make a convincing case for the Joint Budget Committee. All 40 were in treatment as a condition of probation and were looking at 2-6 years in DOC if not successful in the program. Comparing the cost of 2 years in DOC to the cost of 3 months in the Circle Program and factoring in the recidivism rate, I was able to show the JBC that *we saved the state approximately one million dollars* treating those 40 people. This caused them to agree to keep the program open. The Circle Program was in statute and money was appropriated from medical marijuana tax proceeds.

This last closure in 2017 was the worst in that we were not allowed to keep the current patients until they finished their treatment. They were told they would be going to equivalent programs by the OBHS however; there is no equivalent program in the state. Also *we had 101 people on the waiting list* that had been accepted and were waiting for a bed. Arrangements were not made for the majority of these people to get into another program. We are aware of people on that list who are currently sitting in jail or still using or dead. This is very difficult to accept when we know we could have helped them and the program was not closed due to lack of funding or staffing of the Circle Program.

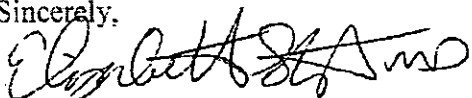
The reason the Circle Program is successful is multi-faceted. I have attached an overview of all the components of the program that contribute to the patients' success. In general reasons include:

- 90 days in a controlled environment
- Totally abstinence based including tobacco which gives the brain an opportunity to heal and be able to learn new things
- Intense cognitive/behavioral evidence based curriculum with 40 hours of group per week with numerous reading and writing assignments
- Trauma work to deal with the underlying reasons they feel the need to use substances to cope
- Skills to learn how to manage symptoms.

The citizens of Colorado need the Circle Program and more programs like it. We need the full continuum of care from drug courts to intensive outpatient to short term inpatient to long term inpatient treatment. The Circle Program is unique in that anyone can be treated whether they have insurance or funding or not. We have treated people from all walks of life including physicians, lawyers, politicians as well as homeless folks with severe and persistent mental illness. Usually the professionals we have seen have lost all of their money paying for numerous other private programs and have lost their livelihood and often have legal charges related to their substance abuse. Circle provides a true safety net for such people and it helps them get back on their feet and become productive members of society. It definitely saves the State of Colorado money as it is significantly less expensive than putting these people in the DOC and it is also more productive for society as a whole.

I urge you to vote yes on keeping the Circle Program an established program that is continuously funded. I think it is highly appropriate to use tax money received from all the addictive substances that are legally sold in Colorado to fund this program, including marijuana, tobacco and alcohol.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Stuyt, MD  
Addiction Psychiatrist  
Medical Director, Circle Program, CMHIP