

Testimony for HB 18-1177

March 9, 2018

Concerning multiple approaches to help prevent youth suicide.

Dear Members of the House Public Health Care and Human Service Committee:

My name is Kelly Dore- I am the National Director of the Human Trafficking Survivor Coalition, based in Colorado and an Ambassador for Shared Hope International. Many of you may recognize me as a former Commissioner and most of you know and served with my husband, Tim.

I am here to ask for your support of Representative Jenet and House Bill 18-1177 and as someone who works with exploited, bullied and homeless youth, we recognize the significant correlation between teen sex trafficking and suicide. Colorado is moving forward in its recognition and services for minor victims and survivors, but we still have a long way to go.

The bill requires the office of suicide prevention (office) in the department of public health and environment (department) to work with appropriate entities to develop and implement a plan to provide access to training programs related to youth suicide prevention for people who regularly interact with youth but who are not in a profession that typically provides such training opportunities, such as camp counselors, recreation center employees, youth group leaders, clergy, and parents. Many displaced youths are forced to endure unspeakable things and many are suicidal because they lack hope for any human interaction or support, the listed places above have contact with these teens and with awareness and prevention strategies in place, will make a difference in one life.

Colorado has one of the highest suicide rates in the nation, with more people dying by suicide in this state than in car crashes or homicides. Suicide is the second-leading cause of death for people ages 10-34. Four counties rank at the top, Jefferson, Mesa, El Paso, and my home county of Douglas, for teen suicide, it is the second leading cause of death for minors 10-17 in the state.

Coming together with other advocates, who work with youth from varying home and socioeconomic backgrounds, we recognize there is a common theme to addressing suicide and prevention in Colorado. **Mental Health.** As a recent study shows that a conservative number of over 478,000 Coloradans are struggling with mental health issues, nearly one third of them are teenagers.

Coloradans who are gay or bisexual are two to three times more likely than heterosexual peers to experience poor mental health, with nearly 60 percent of LGBT high school students reporting poor mental health. There is little difference in the rates of poor mental health by race, but data

shows blacks and Hispanic teens are less likely to receive help from a mental health professional. Just 7 to 8 percent of those minorities receive professional help compared with 13 percent of their white peers. These studies would point to the epidemic in minority communities, however, in schools, we are seeing suicide by just as many white minors as their minority counterparts.

The bill further directs the department to coordinate efforts to create and implement a statewide awareness campaign about suicide and youth suicide prevention, as well as awareness of the suicide prevention hotline. The awareness campaign may include, but is not limited to, the use of written, electronic, radio, and television media. This will reach many students who do not know where to look for help and sometimes the slightest of mention, can open a door of Hope for a student.

The bill clarifies that the age of consent for a minor seeking inpatient psychotherapy or other inpatient mental health services without the consent of a parent or legal guardian remains 15 years of age or older. This is important to protect parental rights, but also ensure help for the minors who need it.

It is imperative that this Committee understands that prevention is key to supporting and decreasing the number of teen suicides in the state. Fiscal records in other states with similar laws do show that it is far cheaper to create prevention programs, than it is to react. We in Colorado have been reacting to tragedy and mental health for far too long, it is time to act and let struggling citizens know that their lives do have a value. On behalf of the displaced population my organization and other organizations in the state work with, I thank you for taking the time to hear this bill and for your consideration. I humbly ask for a yes vote in this committee so that Colorado can show minor that their voices are heard and will continue to matter, that they do have something to live for.

Thank you,

Kelly Dore

Founder & Executive Director

National Human Trafficking Survivor Coalition