



*Testimony from Kate Fitch with the Colorado Mental Wellness Network on HB18-1177*

I support this bill because of my own experiences with childhood mental illness while living in a subculture and family that was not supportive of help-seeking. I first began experiencing symptoms of my mental health condition when I was 8 years old. I have a form of obsessive compulsive disorder called Harm OCD, in which I have unwanted, frightening thoughts and mental images about hurting other people or myself. Unfortunately, I grew up in the fundamentalist Baptist church. The particular group that I was involved with believed that thoughts were the same as actions in God's eyes, I was being sinful and evil by having these thoughts that I didn't want, and that therapists and other form of mental health help were hypnotists who would open your soul to demonic possession. Obviously I was heavily discouraged from any help-seeking.

Throughout my childhood and adolescence, my untreated, unacknowledged mental health problems were left to worsen. In early adulthood, I was admitted to three different psychiatric hospitals and was told that I have severe and persistent mental illness. Fortunately, after long-term psychiatric rehabilitation in the United Kingdom, I have been living in recovery for several years. I work, attend CU Denver, and live independently. However, because my health condition got to such a serious stage, I have had to withdraw from school multiple times, have a large amount of medical debt, and am generally behind in creating an independent life for myself. If I had been able to seek therapy without parental consent in a school setting at an earlier age, perhaps my condition would not have worsened to the extent that it did. I might have succeeded in college the first time around and avoided such extensive medical debt. Most importantly, I might not have experienced a childhood full of fear, anxiety, suicidality, despair, and isolation. No child should have to go through that.

I support this bill because adolescents with mental health concerns should be able to seek therapy without explicit parental consent. Some children have parents that are opposed to therapy due to religion, fear of being discovered as abusers, or even simple desire to control their child to the detriment of their own health. It's important that children who, through no fault of their own, have developed a mental health condition to be able to speak with a professional that can help them. They have a right to health just like any adult.